

Young British Muslims in Higher Education: exploring the experiences and
identities of Bradford students within a narrative framework

Ifsa Hussain

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Abstract

Ifsa Hussain

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This research aims to explore the lived experiences of young British Muslims in higher education at the University of Bradford and the implications this has for the construction of their identities. The increased participation of Muslims in higher education has been hailed a major success story and is said to have enabled the forging of new, alternative, more empowering identities in comparison to previous generations. This thesis provides a new approach in exploring young British Muslims identity by focusing on the dynamics underling identity construction through the use of a pluralistic method to present an array of informants' accounts of their experiences (Frost et al., 2011). Phase one of the research included qualitative ethnographic observations which were carried out at the University of Bradford City Campus and was chosen in order to capture the use of the various social settings by informants and to understand actions, practices and meanings people gave to issues relevant to the research. Moreover, phase one was used to identify diversity of experience and select participants for phase two, the more focused aspect of the study which involved narrative interviews. A generative narrative interview was conducted with five young Muslims and aimed to understand how students negotiated their identity as Muslims in Britain within the higher educational contexts. The research

revealed that rather than Muslims utilising university as a place whereby they are able to forge new identities, as depicted in previous literature, higher education is a context which demands the negotiation of identities that both enabled and constrained.

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Introduction

The focus of this thesis is to explore the lived experiences of British Muslims in higher education and the ways in which young Muslims participate in everyday university life and understand how Muslim students fashion their identities in the public and private sphere. Islam and Muslim youths living in the West have received considerable attention in the recent decades, particular from the media, politicians, public forums and academic circles. They are often depicted as being 'high risk' and associated with terrorism, aggressive behaviour, urban unrest and street crime (Mythen et al, 2009; Dwyer, Shah, and Sanghera, 2008; Archer, 2001). Indeed, this hostile development is often associated with the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the London bombings, which have arguably shaped and influenced the widespread and prevalent discourse that Muslims are a threat to Western democracies (Morgan and Poynting, 2012), as well as influenced government policies relating to British Muslims throughout the 2000s (see Ahmed, 2005; Meer, 2006; Hellyer, 2007; Kazmi, 2007; Morgan and Poynting, 2012; Mustafa, 2002). It has also been stated that following the terrorist attacks, anti-Muslim sentiment has strengthened and the negative media coverage has led to the general increase of Islamophobia and discrimination against British Muslims (Abbas, 2006; Allen, 2001; Ruthven, 2002).

However, the portrayal of Muslims living in the West as a symbol that threatens Western democracies, ideals and lifestyle is said to have existed prior to these significant events. It is also argued that historical happenings such as the demonstrations in relation to The Rushdie Affair also strongly marked the construction of a Muslim identity, as young Muslims mobilised along religious

lines rather than ethnic and racial ones (Modood, 1990; Allen, 2005). Moreover, Gulf War and the protests against attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq also brought Muslim practices under media scrutiny due to their objection being construed as an act of disloyalty to Britain (Werbner, 2000). Additionally, the racialised tension present in Britain was further politicised during the inner-city riots of 2001 in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley between South Asians (Pakistani and Bangladeshi) and White British youth gangs. Follow-up reports suggested that the underlying cause of the unrest was 'self-segregation' and separateness (see Ouseley, 2001) and Islam and Muslim culture was perceived as a threat to British values and identity.

In general, it could be argued that moral panics about extremism and Islam have contributed to the development of an essentialised understanding of what it means to be a Muslim living in Britain (Shah, 2012). Indeed, while the intense scrutiny has left certain groups of Muslims to feel alienated and marginalised from mainstream society, emerging literature suggests that for many diaspora Muslims the challenge posed by living in British society has led them to search for new openings for dialogue and participation while extracting new ways of using their positions to defy stereotypical depictions.

The present research is located in the framework of literature and empirical research that has explored different aspects of identity in the context of minority groups living in Britain (e.g. Archer, 2001; Basit, 1997; Dwyer et al., 2008; Ramji, 2007; Shah et al. 2010). Previous literature research has focused on specific aspects of the identity of young people and common areas of exploration include; negotiation and construction of gender identities (Dwyer, 2000, 2008; Ramji, 2007), the educational aspirations of young British Muslims

(Archer, 2001; Basit, 1997) together with the issue of underachieving Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people (Haque and Bell, 2001). However, the present research argues that some of the previous literature on identity has provided a one-dimensional understanding of the identity of young British Muslims by engaging with issues young people face and on what these identities are like. This thesis provides a different approach in exploring young British Muslims' identity by focusing on the dynamics underling identity construction through the use of a pluralistic method (Frost et al., 2011). The present research uses two qualitative methods of data collection (ethnographic observations and narrative interviews) as a way to present an array of informants' accounts of their experiences. The next section provides an overview of the thesis.

It is conceptually, theoretically and methodologically difficult to navigate the competing epistemologies and ontologies that are brought into play when 'objective' observation of 'them' meets 'critically subjective' reflection on 'me' the insider researcher. Indeed, I was mindful of my insider knowledge and this heightened my awareness of the possible challenges and/or negative implications on the presentation and interpretation of the informant's experience. However, the desire to remain 'objective' would have been misleading as I (the researcher) was central in interpretative process. Indeed, there was somewhat of an increased discomfort around 'truthful' interpretation and representation. However, if an objective stance was taken, it meant that I was not being true to the research's epistemological assumptions of social constructionism. As noted in the theoretical chapter (see Chapter 2) the social constructionist perspectives recognises 'truth' and all meaningful reality as being dependent upon human practices and created by individuals' interaction

with the world (Crotty, 1998). In a post positivist epistemology there is no separation between the researcher and the researched. As such, reality is not independent, but dependent on our descriptions of it. Our research changes the way things are. Therefore, in relation to the current research, it implies that there will be diverse perspectives on a particular topic or subject and as a result of different interpretations there will be multiple understandings of how certain issues regarding the Muslim students' experience appear to different people. As such, we can never be 'objective' in our approach when it comes to theorising descriptive accounts, as it is up to the ethnographer to focus on certain activities, key events, and their reactions to them. For that reason, unconscious analysis of events is constantly occurring as data is being collected.

Overview of the thesis

Chapter 1 begins with an exploration of existing literature related to the social and historical factors that have occurred in relation to the presence of Muslims in the UK. It also addresses the significance of Bradford, the setting of present research, and the national and international media attention Muslims have gained due to a series of political issues surrounding faith and ethnicity and discusses how this may have impacted the lives of young British Muslims (e.g. Honeyford Affair, Rushdie Affair, 1995 riots and 2001 riots). The underachievement of British Muslims in schools will also be discussed while also highlighting the increasing number of young Muslims entering higher education and the potential reasons for such trends. Following on from there, it examines the broader issues related to British Muslim presence in higher education and the potential challenges that may impinge on their experience. This section specifically draws on the generational changes that have occurred

in relation to the presence of Muslim women in higher education and the shifting patterns of education, employment, which in turn are said to have challenged the stereotypical depiction of Muslim women within British society. It also compares the significance of Muslim women's pursuit of higher education in relation to their male counterparts and reviews relevant literature on Muslim men. It concludes with a statement of the research aims.

Chapter 2 is concerned with the theoretical debates framing the present research. The philosophical underpinnings of the research are clarified and the conceptualisation of identity in relation to developmental and social psychological constructs is explored. Finally, the reason for adopting intersectionality and positioning theory to conceptualise the research are made apparent.

Chapter 3 contains an outline of phase one of the research, which included qualitative ethnographical observations carried out at the University of Bradford City Campus. It pays particular attention to the ethical implications, the method utilised and the 'value' the method can bring to understanding the experiences of British Muslims in higher education. Phase one was designed to gain an understanding of the ways in which young Muslims participate in everyday university life and how they presented themselves within the university space. Chapter 4 is concerned with presenting an analysis of the field notes collected in phase one of the research project and explores Muslims motivation, identities and experiences in relation to their presence in a higher educational institute.

Chapter 5 considers the best way to analyse the lived experiences of young British Muslim students pursuing higher education and contains the reasons

why a narrative approach is appropriate when exploring the experiences of the informants participating. It is also concerned with how and why the participants were recruited for this phase of the research and covers the ethical procedure in relation to carrying out narrative interviews. Finally, the method used and the process of interviewing and analysing the interview material are discussed, refined and made explicit. Chapter 6 is concerned with the analysing the interview material and considers the stories of Ayesha, Sara and Fatima. The central plotline for each of their stories respectively is characterised as higher education as *an escape from conforming to the 'good Muslim woman'*; *an educated mother*, and *Muslim women can 'have it all'*. The chapter is concerned with the theme of identity construction and consideration is given to the women's narration to actively challenge the construction of their Muslim femininity. As the women navigate and exercise 'choice' and 'agency', their stories were multifaceted and fixed in relational and meta-narratives available to British Pakistani Muslim women. Moreover, the young women's narratives represent a context that demands the negotiation of identity which can both enable and constrain and therefore complicates the affirmation of new gender identities through their involvement of higher education. Chapter 7 considered the lived experiences of Nabeel and Hamza. The key plotline for their stories is characterised by as *a progressive Muslim* and *maintaining the breadwinner role*. This chapter extends the theme of identity construction and explores the motivations and experiences of young British Muslim men's participation in higher education. Their narratives highlighted the significance of traditional agencies such as family and religion and how they shaped their gender

identities. Indeed, while religious identification was important to both Nabeel and Hamza, how it was articulated varied considerably.

In Chapter 8 the research is summarised and the findings are reviewed in relation to the research aims. The research is also concluded by exploring some of the common themes emerging from the narratives of the participants and consideration is given to how the thesis contributes to existing literature on British Muslims within the higher education context. The value of the methodology and methods are evaluated and the limitations of the research are considered. The chapter also addresses how this research might be built upon and carried forward.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

This research is about young British Muslims and how they negotiate their identities within the context of higher education. There is a relatively large body of literature on British Muslims compared to people of other faiths and this chapter presents relevant literature and debates related to their presence in the UK. Indeed, existing literature varies and interest spans from radicalisation of young Muslims to the oppression of Muslim women. As the number of young British Muslim entering higher education is increasing, their educational and employment statuses are also becoming increasingly researched and discussed in emerging literature.

This chapter is structured into three main parts. Firstly, I will begin by reviewing the history of Muslim migration to the UK, why they came and their reasons for settling. This includes a discussion related to the general profile of Muslims in the UK, with specific reference to the city of Bradford. Bradford is known for its large Muslim population and has been in the media spotlight for a number of reasons, for example the Rushdie Affair (see Akhtar, 1989; Samad, 1992, Nasta, 2002) and the riots that took place in the summer of 2001.

I will then move on to discuss issues surrounding the underachievement of British Muslims in schools and the reasons as to why such trends occur. Although research has suggested that some young British Muslim learners are leaving school with low grades or no qualifications, others are using education as a means to improve their job prospects, financial stability and social mobility. The literature review will also draw on the role of family when it comes to young Muslims attainment and aspirations in education.

Finally, I will move on to discuss the broader experiences of students who progress to university and what attending university means to them. I will also draw upon literature on the experiences of British Muslims in higher education and the challenges that might have an impact upon their experiences. This section will also look at gender differences that are often identified when it comes to discussing academic achievements amongst Muslims. Particular reference will be made to the presence of Muslim women in higher education as research suggests that young British Muslim women are gradually altering educational and employment patterns, compared to the earlier generations (Anwar, 2005). Such evidence suggests that in comparison to men, women are using education as way to challenge stereotypical depictions of Muslim women and drawing on agentic means to alter, challenge and generate new gender identities within the public and private sphere (Mohee, 2011).

From migrant to citizen

Britain's connection with the Muslim world dates back to the seventh century through trade with Egypt and Palestine (Kabir, 2010). Furthermore, records have indicated the presence of Muslims in London since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as well as showing that a small number of Muslims from Yemen and Bangladesh have lived in the United Kingdom since the late 1880s. However, it was not until the 1951 census that the presence of Muslims was officially recorded, during which time there were almost 5,000 registered as being a Muslim (Baxter, 2006). Mass Muslim migration to Britain began in the mid-twentieth century during the post-Second World War reconstruction period during which time there was a greater need for labourers. These openings were filled through the arrival of individuals from ex-colonial states and many of the

arriving immigrants had served as colonial soldiers (Baxter, 2006, Gilliat-Ray, 2010, Kabir, 2010). People born in Commonwealth countries came to be seen as 'citizens' as opposed to 'subjects' and therefore, prior to 1962 all colonial subjects entering the UK were offered citizenship (Baxter, 2006). It was the opportunity to claim Western citizenship, as well as the economic incentive that attracted many immigrants at the time to Britain (Saifullah-Khan, 1976; Ballard, 1994; Shaw, 1994; Baxter, 2006).

The partition of India in 1947 was also the beginning of a large-scale immigration from India and Pakistan. Throughout the 1950s the rate of immigration into the UK from the subcontinent increased to up to 10,000 per year (Nielsen, 2004). Immigrant men found work in London and the surrounding cities in jobs that required little experience and were often avoided by those born in Britain (Baxter, 2006). It is thought that for many Muslim Pakistani men, arriving in the UK meant earning and saving as much as possible in order to then return to their native country to buy land or to retire comfortably (Saifullah-Khan, 1976; Ballard, 1994). Indeed, for many immigrants, the economic incentive was not only for individual gain but it was also motivated by the notion that their earnings will help improve the economic situation for their families 'back home' (Shaw, 1994).

Due to the changes in the economic climate in the 1960s, the immigration policy was reviewed and immigration restrictions were put in place. This was in response to race riots that took place in Nottingham and Notting Hill in 1958, which instigated a widespread debate about the scale of migration and resulted in the development of racialised politics in Britain (Solomos, 1989). An underlying concern at the time was the future of 'race relations' in British society

and there were concerns that the influx of migrants would lead to problems in relation to housing, employment and social services (Patterson, 1969; Freeman, 1979; Solomos, 2003). For those already in Britain, family reunification schemes were developed to allow wives and children to join their husbands and fathers (Baxter, 2006). Indeed, Muslim economic migrants arriving to the UK functioned as 'bridgeheads' for the chain of migration that followed, as families starting to join the workers (Vertovec, 2002:19). The arrival and settlement of Muslims families in the UK indicated that they identified Britain as their homeland, thus suggesting a fundamental change in the development of the British Muslim community (Baxter, 2006).

However, many Muslims, especially the initial post-war migrants, still expressed the intention to return home eventually (Gilliat-Ray, 2010). According to Saifullah-Khan (1976) for them living and working in Britain was a means to raise their and their families' economic and social status back home. Therefore, they were neither primarily concerned with their status in Britain, nor with altering their lifestyle to accommodate to British society. On the contrary, a lot of emphasis was placed on retaining their traditional cultural values, especially those relating to their obligations towards their extended family and kin (Shaw, 1994). In addition, the first substantial wave of South Asian Muslims settling in Britain after 1945 was almost entirely driven by economic motivations.

The later migration of Muslims from other parts of the world was due to a range of other factors which added to the Muslim community's diverse composition in Britain (Gilliat-Ray, 2010). Political upheavals, such as the 1979 Iranian Revolution resulted in political asylum becoming a source of Muslim immigration. Skilled professionals from Muslim countries such as Iran,

Afghanistan and Iraq migrated in the 1970s and 1980s and added new social and political dimensions to the comparatively homogenous ethnic background which had previously characterised the community (Ansari, 2004; Baxter, 2006). Other than the small number of Yemenis and Cypriot Turks, the overwhelming majority of British Muslims are from the South Asian (Pakistan, India and Bangladesh) subcontinent (Ansari, 2004).

Additionally, this period also saw the arrival of prominent and wealthy Arabs (from Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Palestine and Jordan) who took advantage of their financial gains from the oil crisis and sought to further their fortunes and secure their investments in Britain, as it was regarded as the safer option due to the political instability of their home country (Ansari, 2004). Muslims who migrated from the Middle East had a diverse profile, but were for the most part middle-class professionals (El-Solh, 1992; Gilliat-Ray, 2010). Although Middle Eastern Muslims and South Asian Muslims shared a common religious identity, the internal diversity in terms of language, history, ethnicity and education as well as religious traditions were often relatively different (Gilliat-Ray, 2010), thus further highlighting the multiplicity within the Muslim community and rejecting the idea that it is a homogenous group. Indeed, changes and diversity within the Muslim community continued due to Muslims arriving to the UK from East Africa in the early 1970s (Gilliat-Ray, 2010; Baxter, 2006; Ansari, 2004).

As discussed, Muslims migrated to the UK for a number of different reasons, from financial stability to political unsettlement. It is important to note that the present research aims to explore one aspect of the diverse Muslim communities in Britain and looks to understand the experiences of British Pakistani Muslims.

Moreover, unlike some of the previous literature on British Muslims, the analytical phase will not serve to essentialise and understand the Muslim community as a homogenous entity. Rather, it is bound by the personal narratives and aims to contribute to knowledge on the process of identity negotiation by using a narrative approach as a novel methodology in the literature to date. The following section will highlight characteristics of the current Muslim population and the regions and cities around the UK in which they are predominantly settled.

Population and settlement of Muslims in the UK

During the large-scale settlement of immigrant Muslims, many moved to Britain's major manufacturing industrial towns and cities in North-West England, Yorkshire and the Midlands (Gilliat-Ray, 2010; Lewis, 2007). These areas, as well as London today contain sizeable Muslim communities; with a large number of Muslims residing in cities such as Birmingham and Bradford (Hamid, 2011). The largest group of Muslims in Britain originate from Pakistan and Bangladesh and therefore are generally the most researched ethnic group due to the fact that they make up the largest portion of the Muslim population (Lewis, 2007).

According to the latest estimates the current population of British Muslims in the UK is approximately 2.7 million (ONS, 2012) compared to that of the 2001 UK census, which indicated that the population was approximately 1.6 million. According to the 2011 census, almost two thirds of Muslims in Britain (67%) are from a South Asian ethnic background, predominantly Pakistani (38%), Bangladeshi (15%), Indian (7%) and other Asian (7%) (ONS, 2012). The

remainder represent Muslims from the Middle East, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In addition there are a significant number of Muslims who describe themselves as 'White' and about a third of these are 'white-British', which include Turkish, Cypriots and white-British converts (ONS, 2012). African-Caribbean converts to Islam also add to this diversity (Lewis, 2007). In addition, Muslims have a youthful profile as a third of Muslims (33%) are under the age of 16 and less than one in 10 are over 65 years. Approximately half of the British Muslim population were born in the UK, with the median age of the population being 25 years old, compared to the overall population median age of 40 years (ONS, 2012).

The socio-economic status of Muslims in the UK

The 2011 census data revealed that although Muslims are considered a tightly knit community, they are also economically disadvantaged. This section will draw on a report compiled by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB, 2015) using census data related to British Muslim's population from 2001 and 2011. The report reveals that with regards to qualification, there had been a reduction in the percentage of Muslims with no qualifications between 2001 and 2011, from 39% in 2001 to 26% in 2011. However, this is higher in comparison to the percentage of Hindus and Sikhs with no qualification, which is at 13.2% and 19.4% respectively. Indeed, this trend continues and figures show that 24% of Muslims have attained a degree qualification and above, compared to 44.6% and 30.1% of Hindus and Sikhs respectively. Indeed, the data reveals that the educational profile of the Muslim population in general is failing to keep up with the Hindu and Sikh communities. However, there is some room for optimism, as

census data indicates that almost 6% of Muslims have managerial or professional roles and are therefore only slightly under-represented compared to the overall population at 7.6%. In addition, 9.7% of Muslims are employed in low paid, low skilled and unskilled manual jobs but again there is no significant difference in comparison to the national average of 9.3%. However, despite the increased level of education over the last 10 years, Muslims continue to have the highest rate of unemployment compared with the national average. According to the report, 7.2% of Muslims are unemployed compared to 4% of the overall population. Furthermore, 71.2% of Muslim women aged 16-24 are not in employment, the highest unemployment rate of any religious group (MCB, 2015).

According to the MCB (2015) report and emerging literature (see Weller and Purdam, 2000; Heath and Martin, 2012; Nabil and Johnston, 2014) the high unemployment levels of British Muslim minorities is linked to them facing discrimination in areas such as education, employment and the media, and are therefore suffering 'cultural penalties' in the labour market over and above the general ethnic penalty. Although many young British Muslims are able to overcome these difficulties and cultivate a successful life trajectory, a growing number continue to face a range of challenges which hinder their prospects and cause social exclusion (Hamid, 2011). Emerging research into the socio-economic status of British Muslim communities suggests that disadvantaged urban areas are disproportionately represented, showing high levels of deprivation, structural inequality, disadvantage and discrimination, which further add to the underlying issues for the low socioeconomic status of Muslims (Beckford et al., 2006; Phillips, 2006).

One city noted for its large Muslim population in the UK is Bradford, the location for this research. The 2011 UK census estimated that the Bradford Metropolitan District has a total population of 522,452 with 25% identifying themselves as Muslim (ONS, 2012). The following section will look at the significance of Bradford and its context in terms of level of employment, demography and community integration.

The significance of Bradford

The majority of the Muslims in Bradford have origins in Pakistan, in particular Mirpur, Attock, and Rawalpindi, with a smaller community of Bangladeshis with roots in rural Sylhet (Lewis, 2007; Samad, 2010). The Pakistani Muslim population first came to Bradford to work in the textile industry in places like Lister Mills (Lewis, 1994). However, the gradual decline of the textile industry meant 60,000 textile jobs were lost between 1960 and 1990 (Kabir, 2010) and the majority of first-generation migrant-settlers were affected (Cantle, 2001; Lewis, 2007; Ouseley, 2001). Since this collapse, Bradford continues to remain a low-wage economy with significant emphasis on employment in declining manufacturing industries (Darlow, et al., 2005; Husband et al., 2014).

The public sector is also important and accounts for approximately a quarter of all employment in the city. According to research, the youth employment in Bradford's 'flexible' labour economy means that young people continue to move through a series of low-paid and low-skill jobs (Husband, 2000; City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2010; 2012). Indeed, this trend has important implications for young people living in Bradford, with nearly a quarter under the age of 16 (23.5%), it is likely to affect their employment opportunities and the

numbers entering the job market. Reports also indicate that physical and social deprivation, and high unemployment levels are prominent in the areas where the Asian Muslim population reside (Allen, 2003; Darlow et al., 2005; Phillips, 2006; City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2010).

Community, politics and demography

Following the economic collapse of the textile industry, many Pakistani Muslims remained in Bradford. The British Muslim population is largely clustered in the poorer, central areas of the city, especially in the neighbourhoods of Manningham, Toller, Little Horton and Bradford Moor (Darlow et al., 2005; Phillips, 2006). These ethnic clusters developed over time and within the inner-city population and in the district as a whole there has been an increase in the Pakistani population, with a seemingly complimentary decline in White, Black and Indian ethnic heritage groups (Thapar-Bjorkert and Sanghera, 2010).

Bradford is largely known for a number of political issues surrounding faith and ethnicity. Local campaigns in schools for halal meals, withdrawal from Christian assembly, the development of Muslim schools in the 1980s and the right to wear the hijab (a head covering) all gained the attention of the national press and added to the rise of a Muslim faith identity (Hamid, 2011). This period was often marked by communal conflicts, in which the Muslim community were trying to establish their rights and create an autonomous British Muslim identity. Indeed, this rose to the surface during the Rushdie Affair in the late eighties when protests against Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses* attracted national and international attention as the book was burnt during a demonstration by a section of Bradford's Muslim population (Lewis, 1994). Indeed, this has since been identified as a significant event in British social and

political history while further highlighting the continuation of Bradford's Muslim community struggling to establish their rights. Modood's (1990) research found that protestors interviewed used words such as 'honour' and 'dignity' when referencing the 'Rushdie Affair' thus suggesting this particular section of the Muslim community was demanding their dignity as Muslims be respected by the rest of society. Moreover, according to Fischer and Abedi (1990) the Rushdie Affair was a clash between two cultures and the behaviour demonstrated by Muslims was more specifically to do with social relations beyond the text. Instead, their reaction was considered to be a resistance to the growing racist atmosphere they faced whilst in Britain, with the understanding that their voices were being systematically ignored. However, the media imagery of angry demonstrators and inflammatory placards served to further alienate the Muslim community as the negative and fearsome image of Muslims remained fixed in the public's imagination (Lewis, 1994, p. 159). The Bradford riots in 1995 also added to the narrative of racism. Though official reports blamed the disturbances in Manningham on 'anti-social' individuals (The Bradford Commission Report, 1996: 11), others argued that the internal conflicts within the city were caused by perceived unfair treatment towards the Muslim community by the police (Jan-Khan, 1995).

However, in contrast, the 2001 riots were characterised as being more complex, with groups of Muslim youths taking to the streets to 'defend' their community against the perceived 'threat' of the British National Party (BNP). The disturbances put Bradford at the centre of a specific political perception of perceived 'self-segregation' and a series of reports into the riots addressed this issue. According to the official reports (see Cantle Report, 2001) the riots were

a result of cultural differences, self-segregation and long term conditions of social marginalization for both the South Asian and White communities.

The reports suggested that the 2001 riots were due to the ethnic 'segregation' and inner-city clustering in the northern towns of Britain. 'Self-segregation' was deemed to be a 'problem' and the reports put forward the argument that it was largely due to failings by the ethnic minorities, who have failed to integrate, socially, culturally and economically (Cantle Report, 2001; Ouseley, 2001). The ethnic areas in Bradford mentioned earlier were reported as having high levels of social deprivation, poverty and drug related crime. In addition, the Muslim community were presented as being socially deprived and backward, and community leaders were blamed for failing to keep their 'youth' under control (Kundnani, 2001). However, a number of commentators (see Burnett, 2004 and 2008; McGhee, 2003; Flint and Robinson, 2008) criticised the policy for failing to acknowledge the implications of racism and economic inequalities as facets behind the disturbances. In addition, it was argued that the concern over patterns of social and spatial class segregation constructed communities 'as being responsible for isolation perceived as negative' (Slade, 2010: 2). Indeed, by failing to recognise the deep rooted 'resentment over social exclusion, youth alienation and poor community-police relations' (Philips, 2006: 26) an unbalanced discourse against the Muslim communities fashioned the city as being divided. Moreover, by discursively constructing ethnic and cultural tensions as 'the problem' the complex reality of social relations in the city are oversimplified and disregarded the deep rooted socio-economic difficulties the city's residents face (see Burnett, 2004; 2008; McGhee, 2003; Flint and Robinson, 2008).

Research by Philips (2006) examined the dialogue in relation to the changes that have occurred due British Muslims' isolation and self-segregation in Bradford, which have been closely linked to the persistence of inter-city ethnic deprivation. Philips (2006) argued that many British Muslims had no desire to live a segregated life in ethnic clusters and structural disadvantages, such as poverty, hindered the decision to buy a house in more affluent areas in and around Bradford. Moreover, fear was also present when it came to spatial mobility, and many families, including middle-class households elected to remain in the inner-city housing as precautionary measures. The research also found that elderly people in Bradford were especially reliant on community networks and valued living amongst people of the same ethnicity and religion, for reasons such as culture and tradition, familiarity, identity and security.

However, it was not until relatively recently that educational attainment provided a means by which Muslims could 'improve' themselves and move out of Bradford. Indeed, for the younger members of the community education was seen as the preferred choice but the desire to relocate was not easily achievable as many parents did not want their children to move away (Philips, 2006). Similarly, research by McGarrigle and Kearns (2009) on South Asians in a different site of significant ethnic minority settlement (Glasgow) where issues relating to race, equality and political change are said to be salient, also identified distinctive pattern of ethnic mobilisation. They found that young Muslims did want to move to the suburbs but chose not to due to the fear of victimisation in an unfamiliar territory. Indeed, while education is constructed as a means to improve social mobility, reports show that educational attainment of young Muslims is generally poor in comparison to British White or other ethnic

minority groups (see DfE, 2015; Shain, 2011) and the next section will discuss the possible reasons as to why Muslim learners are underachieving.

The academic achievements of Muslims

British Asians have been a topic of intense academic interest since the 1990s and early literature described the family/community as being 'tightly knit' and supportive of their children's educational achievements and producers of 'good' children. However, there were differences in the way British Muslims were perceived compared to those of other faiths, in that Muslim students were often characterised as 'believers', whose religious identity took precedence over their commitment to secular education, whereas in comparison British Sikh and British Hindus were depicted as 'achievers' due to their high academic aspirations (Alexander, 2000; Archer, 2003; Hussain, 2008; Shain, 2011). Although recent figures show the gaps in educational achievement have narrowed considerably over the past decade and noteworthy progress has been made by all ethnic minority groups (namely Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Other Asian and Blacks), the reality of Asian pupils 'achievement' is questionable as attainment varies across genders and between groups (DfE, 2015). It is generally Indian Sikh and Hindu pupils who achieve the better grades as opposed to Pakistani Muslims pupils who attain much lower grades (Shain, 2011).

Moreover, the statistics on Muslim achievement also reveals a complex picture, in that Muslim girls in comparison to their Muslim male peers perform comparatively better in examinations at age 16 (see DfE, 2015), therefore suggesting that Muslim adolescent boys are not fulfilling their educational

potential in core subjects. The national 'underachievement' of boys more generally has been linked with the 'crisis of masculinity' and 'laddish culture' (Francis, 2000; Frost et al., 2002). According to the media, the 'gender gap' is due to a lack of positive role models, the nature of assessment, and a general 'blaming' discourse directed at girls and female teachers (Renold, 2001). Literature on masculinity and schooling highlights the importance of schools when it comes to the shaping of modern masculinity among boys (Connell, 1996). Epstein et al. (1998) suggest that many constructions of masculinity in schools, including versions that involve engaging in 'resistance' to schooling are due to boys rejecting academic work because it is perceived as being 'feminine'. Indeed, research (see Alexander, 2000; Archer, 2003; Shain, 2011) has also shown similar trends among Muslim boys and has linked their attitudes to schooling around dominant 'hegemonic' masculinity (Connell, 1995), 'Black' masculine forms of the 'gangsta' and the 'lad' (Archer, 2003). According to Archer's (2003) research, Muslim boys' schooling illustrates the feminisation of male academic success and it was found that many Muslim boys liken high achievement and academic study with femininity or something 'girls do'. Intelligence and being clever are often interpreted as an absence of an overt subscription to dominant modes of masculinity.

Although the literature above identifies some heterogeneity between boys in general and black boys, it still remains a simplistic conceptualisation and reduces 'masculinity' and 'femininity' into essentialist categories. Moreover, this approach disregards the differences present among boys and girls, and the impact of structural determinants such as class, race. In addition, it overlooks the cultural constructions of gender which could form a barrier to aspirations

and future choices. Indeed, literature has drawn on a multitude of factors in relation to educational underachievement among Muslims and refers to issues such as overcrowded housing, residence in deprived neighbourhoods, parental unemployment or employment in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs, the relative absence of parental English language skills in some Muslim communities, low levels of parental engagement with mainstream schools, low teacher expectations, racism and anti-Muslim prejudice as contributing factors (see Lewis, 2002, Archer, 2003; Hussain, 2008; Wilkinson, 2011; Shain, 2011). Additionally, religious identity has also been shown to play an important role in the underachievement of Muslim students (Zine 2007). The events that have occurred over the past decade, ranging from the Rushdie Affair in the late eighties (Akhtar, 1989; Asad; 1990; Modood, 1990), the so called 'war on terror' (Samad and Sen, 2007), the controversy surrounding the Danish cartoons (Meer, 2009; Lindekilde et al., 2009) as well as matters concerning the hijab (Laborde, 2008; Heine; 2009) are all believed to have caused a range of responses leading to underachievement and increased a sense of isolation among the young Muslims in mainstream schools. According to Shah (2006), faith identity and the events listed above have caused British Muslim students to become victims of discrimination, racism, religious hatred and stereotyping, all of which are said to have affected their academic performance.

Moreover, teachers have proposed that the underachievement of Muslim pupils is due to a cultural clash between their home and school, with parents being blamed for restricting and oppressing their children (Rattansi, 1992). Particular emphasis has been placed on oppressive gender relations, which are exemplified by the restrictions placed on girls. Early literature suggested that girls, in

comparison to their male counterparts, experienced conflict between the public (school), where they could escape from repressive family relations and the private (home) sphere, where certain cultural restrictions applied (Ballard, 1994). Indeed, Muslim girls were often at the centre of debates when it came to their participation in extra-curricular activities and over whether they should be allowed to wear trousers or the headscarf to school. This led to Muslim girls being negatively portrayed as differences and cultural boundaries were drawn upon (Archer, 2003). In addition, the stereotypical depictions of young Muslim girls as 'submissive' and 'obedient' contributed to the racialisation of their gender identities at school (Mohee, 2011). However, due to the negative attention, academics attempted to pull apart the various myths surrounding Muslim girls and emphasis was placed upon the ways in which they construct and negotiate their identity (Basit, 1997; Shain, 2003). Yet, in comparison their male Muslim counterparts occupied the status of a 'new folk devil' (Shain, 2011) and Cohen (2002:2) referred to them as a reminder of 'what we should not be'. Although early literature fashioned young Asian men as being effeminate, quiet and academically inclined (Connolly, 1998; Ghuman, 1999), events such as the Rushdie Affair and the inter-city disturbances in northern cities, constructed young Muslim and Asian men as violently aggressive and culturally dysfunctional (Alexander, 2000; 2004).

The cultural construction of gender may have led to the high levels of underachievement among British Pakistani Muslims as they continue to suffer academically, culturally and linguistically compared to other ethnic groups (Ahmad, 2002; Archer, 2003; Haque, 2000; Shah, 2009). Indeed, the most recent census data revealed that although British Muslims in 2011 are

comparatively better educated than they were in 2001, there still remains concerns over their educational achievements, as a high percentage of learners continue to leave school with low grades or no qualifications (ONS, 2012; MCB, 2015). Although there are legitimate concerns regarding British Muslims academic performance, relatively recent data suggests that a rising number of affluent and qualified Muslims are becoming a prominent feature of British society (Shah, 2012). Moreover, Modood's (2006; 2014) research indicates that despite the concerns, British Pakistani Muslims are still more likely than their white working-class peers to attend university. Therefore, demonstrating young Asian Muslim adults desire to continue studying post-16 compulsory education (see Modood, 1993; Bhopal, 1997). Though the underachievement of young Muslims has been the focus of much research (e.g. Anwar and Bakhsh, 2002; Bhatti, 2003), there remains little mention of the success stories of British Muslims, their experiences and motivations. The present research aims to look beyond the school system, and while the research does not have a predefined focus on attainment, it aims to explore aspirations at the higher educational level. The next section considers the changing trends in relation to young people's participation in post-compulsory education and relevant theories which could be used to understand the increased interest. It also signposts British Muslims progress to university and draws on sociological notions of 'ethnic capital' that have often been used to help understand Muslims engagement and investment in higher education.

Progression to university

Higher education has gone through considerable change in the last fifty years and what was once considered a prestigious accolade for prominent members

of society has now developed into a mass system of education and a standardised pathway towards individuality, financial independence and self-efficiency associated with adulthood (Nagel and Wallace, 1997). Indeed, the increased participation is considered a significant trend effecting young people's experiences (see Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Nagel and Wallace, 1997; Wyn and Dwyer, 2000), with figures suggesting that the number of 18-23 year olds in higher education has risen from 14% in 1980 to 43% in 2006 (Shattock, 2010). The most recent figures show that approximately 36% of 18-19 year olds are entering higher education in Britain, a figure that has plateaued for the past decade (Higher Education Funding Council of England, 2014). Indeed, with more young people entering higher education, their perception of university is often said to be situated around a growing aspiration for better jobs and greater social mobility, while holding onto the belief that a degree will improve career opportunities and life chances (Kogan and Hanney, 2000; Brown et al., 2011). Although early literature highlighted a relationship between investing in higher education and labour market success (Nagel and Wallace, 1997), more recent studies state that the relationship between the two is more complex and in many ways unpredictable (Dwyer et al., 2005). Brown et al. (2011) argue that while academic credentials may be necessary due to the competitive nature of the labour market, the marketization of education has led to the illusion that investing in higher education will have a direct impact on social capital gains.

The changing patterns of higher educational participation in the UK could be partly due to the collapse of the youth labour market in the 1980s and employment opportunities that were restructured in such a way that there was a sharp decline in demand for unqualified, minimum-aged school leavers and

greater emphasis on training and job flexibility (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). A range of measures were put in place by the New Labour Government (1997-2010) to compensate for the decline of readily available jobs, such as apprenticeships, internships and the expansion of post-compulsory education.

In addition, the government responded to the changes in economic conditions by conducting a comprehensive revision of educational goals, and introducing policy discourses such as 'lifelong learning' and 'widening participation' to supposedly help young people navigate their way through a series of complex choices and decisions (Bhopal and Maylor, 2013). Indeed, by doing so young people are remaining in school for longer, altering the trends in educational participation and prolonging the transition between school and work (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). As such, these changes presented young people with a new set of choices which placed emphasis on the economic importance of educational credentials while also raising uncertainty about the predictability of job security outcomes. Indeed, this gave rise to new patterns of transition and encouraged young people to increase agency over their lives (Wyn and Dwyer, 2000). The changing patterns in schooling and the extended period between adolescence (school) and young adulthood (work) has been described as an unpredictable period which allows for identity explorations, self-focus and possibility (Arnett, 2000).

Although it has been argued that identity exploration is a lifelong process, it is proposed by some that individuals may capitalise on the extended transition to adulthood and use it as an opportunity to explore identity beyond school. With the rise in young people pursuing higher education, their time at university is often depicted as a period where they are no longer bound to structured school

schedules and are yet to enter the world of full-time work, and in some cases are still financially reliant on their parents (Arnett, 1998; Schwartz et al., 2013). For these young people, attending university means moving into new social environments and enables them to create the foundation for a number of areas of life, such as work, family, and other relationships (Lairio et al., 2011).

The relatively recent focus in the literature on the transition from adolescence to adulthood, or the 'emerging adult' stage as it has been theorised (Arnett, 2004), has situated higher education as a 'critical moment' in people's lives (Henderson et al., 2007). A study by Lairio et al. (2011) indicated that younger students identified their time at university as a period to seek independence, as it comprised their leaving home and taking responsibility for their own actions and choices. During their time in a higher educational institute, young people had to make independent decisions and therefore had to develop the courage to face new challenges. The students' responses to studying at university revealed that for some, it was an ideal environment to construct alternative identities, before entering 'adulthood'. Indeed, higher education is an attractive choice as it delays the demands of working life and adult responsibilities and is often interpreted as a positive and transformative experience.

Research has also suggested that young university students experience 'identity discontinuity' as they leave behind familiar learning contexts and adjust to their changing status (Scanlon et al. 2007). This could be due to them moving away from home (Holmstrom et al. 2002), developing new friendships (Brooks 2005), as well as worrying about generating income and sustaining employment in the future (Henderson et al. 2007). Literature has drawn on 'traditional' identity-development theories (i.e. Erikson, 1968, 1982; Marcia, 1966, 1980)

and proposed that parenting, family, and peer relationships as well as the time spent at university can either enhance or hinder students' identity development towards adulthood (e.g. Adams et al., 2006; Jordyn and Byrd, 2003; Zimmermann and Becker-Stoll, 2002). By examining Erikson's (1968) ideas, the period spent at university was recognised as 'institutionalised moratorium' during which time students have the potential to experiment with different roles, responsibilities, values, and identity images to reshape the process of developing a stable and coherent identity construction. It is argued that during their university studies, students reflect on various positions available and construct an identity that represents both their academic and professional lives (Jordyn and Byrd, 2003). Indeed, while 'institutionalised moratorium' is not applicable to all young people in the West, it remains potentially relevant to those involved in higher education as this is defined as an opportunity for a longer period of moratorium. However there might be some restrictions placed on young Muslim students as they are often less likely to live away from home and continue to have family obligations and commitments (Ahmad, 2003) and therefore may have less of an opportunity to explore, negotiate and construct alternative identities.

In order to understand young people's academic aspirations, educational literature has engaged with Bourdieu's theoretical framework (Mirza, 1992; Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Archer and Francis, 2006) and draws on sociological notions of social and ethnic capital as shaping educational success and failure. According to Bourdieu the possession of cultural capital and habitus facilitates success in the educational system and the academic failure of individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds is

expected and inevitable. However, growing research (see Modood and Shiner, 1994; Modood and Acland, 1998; Ahmad, 2001; Ball et al, 2002; Reay et al, 2002; Abbas, 2004; Modood, 2006; Bhopal, 2010), has consistently shown that despite parents lack of academic credentials or their low socio-economic background, Muslim students are often more likely than their white working-class counterparts to submit applications to university.

In order to explain working-class Muslims educational participation and aspirations, academics have once again drawn upon Bourdieu's (1984) theoretical framework (e.g. see Modood, 2004; Zhou, 2005; Archer and Francis, 2007; Shah et al., 2010) and proposed that the rise may be due to South Asian parents assisting their children's decision to pursue higher education. Although this varies across different ethnic groups, it is usually done by encouraging a positive attitude towards academic achievement and depicting educational achievement as a means of social mobility (see Modood, 2004; Shah et al, 2010; Zhou, 2005). Indeed, economic detriment is compensated through strong parental involvement, family norms and aspirations, as well as a broader set of community values and networks that promote particular educational goals, otherwise known as 'ethnic capital' (Modood, 2004). According to Shah et al. (2010) 'ethnic capital' is significant in explaining why working class ethnic minorities enter higher education as it is through strong social relationships that parents transmit aspirations, expectations and achievements to their children.

Indeed, Modood (2004) suggests that ethnic minority individuals' high educational ambitions materialise due to parental personal ambition for upward mobility. It is argued that specific parenting styles and cultural endowment, obligations and expectations make it possible to convey this ambition

successfully to children at an early stage. It is therefore assumed that their children will adopt these beliefs, values and perspective efficiently and develop ambitions and priorities consistent with those of their parents (Modood, 2004). Research has also found that education is emphasized in working class Pakistani Muslim narratives as a tool for social mobility (Thapar-Bjorkert and Sanghera, 2010; Modood, 2006; Ahmed, 2001). Studies on Pakistani Muslims and educational aspirations have found that parents play an important role in young Muslims educational choices and use their disadvantage in the UK to encourage and transmit the importance of education to their children (Thapar-Bjorkert and Sanghera, 2010; Dale et al., 2002). Thapar-Bjorkert and Sanghera (2010) also found that Muslim Pakistani students in Bradford felt compelled to do well at school as their parents made sacrifices to ensure they receive the appropriate education, thus internalizing its importance. Furthermore, Modood's (2006) research found that for many young Muslims educational aspirations are not limited to social and ethnic capital; rather Islam also plays a role in motivating them to improve and lead a disciplined, responsible life.

By theorising ethnicity as a form of social capital, parents are depicted as socialising their children as to the importance of education and encouraging participation (Modood, 2014; Shah et al., 2010). According to Phoenix and Tizard (1996, p. 247) social class differentiates 'people's lives and experiences' and is an identity issue which has an important effect over people's life chances, self-concepts and world views. However, social capital explanations lack the ability to conceptualise class, both in itself and in conjunction with other social identities and forms of social stratification (Thapar-Bjorkert and Sanghera, 2010; Shah et al., 2010). Moreover, by drawing on

notions of social and ethical capital, young people are being treated as ‘empty vessels’ who lack agency in articulating their own identities. Therefore, this deterministic understanding does not provide a conceptual framework with which to analyse the complex processes of interaction between individuals and wider social structural circumstance (Bagguley and Hussain, 2014). The next section is concerned with challenging the culturally homogenous construct of social capital and draws on power relations and agency that are often inadvertently ignored. It also considers British Muslims’ presence in higher education and explores their experiences in relation to how university facilities cater for their needs. Moreover, literature relevant to the ways in which young British Muslims negotiate their identities within a higher educational context is also considered.

Young Muslims experiences of higher education

Although there are no official statistics to illustrate the number of Muslim students attending university in the UK, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) has estimated there to be over 330,000 (MCB, 2015). According to recent figures, there has been a steady increase in the participation rates of the broader population of ethnic minority students in higher education compared to the previous generation (Shiner and Modood, 2002; Anwar, 2005; Modood, 2014). As such, ethnic minority students’ presence in higher education in the UK is hailed as a major success story and now represents almost one in six home undergraduates (Modood, 2006; 2014). These generational changes highlight that ethnic minorities (including young Muslims) are aiming for alternative life options by choosing educational routes and drawing upon the value placed on academic qualification, as well as their own aspirations (Mohee, 2011). The

literature reviewed below demonstrates that while many Muslims are successful at university, there are possible challenges that might impinge upon their experience of higher education and are worthy of in-depth exploration.

Although there is some literature in relation to Muslims engagement with higher education, much of it does not provide evidences in relation to their lived experiences, rather it shows a range of structural issues that either benefit or hinder their university experience. For example, research in America has concentrated on the experiences of ethnic minority religious groups in higher education, including Muslims and found that many felt isolated, feared loneliness, and experienced conflicts between religious holidays and university schedules and examinations, and campus spaces that contradict religious principles (Abu El-Haj, 2002; Kahan, 2003; Harper and Quaye, 2009). A number of studies also found that minority students who studied in institutes with a large population of white students felt they needed to prove their intellectual abilities compared to their white counterparts and experienced a lack of commitment from their higher education institution to promote diversity and multiculturalism (Fries-Britt and Turner, 2001; Watson et al., 2002; Harper and Quaye, 2009).

Similarly, in the UK it has also been found that many Muslim students do not feel they can practice their religion freely and identified it as the most challenging aspect of being a student in a higher education institute (FOSIS, 2005). Although the majority of students felt that their university accommodated their needs as a Muslim, almost a quarter did not. Similarly, a relatively recent survey on students in further education (FE) and higher education (HE) in London found that over half of the sample thought the university or college met their needs in most cases, whereas a third felt they were partially met and a

small minority felt their needs were not met at all (10%) (OPM, 2009). In relation to this, Asmar (2006) found that practical issues such as prayer spaces, washing facilities, halal food on campus and catering for religious holidays and Friday prayers could all influence Muslim students' experiences. However, there was a difference in opinion when it came to universities making special arrangements for the needs of the Muslim students; these needs included both practical issues and issues related to emotional support. Many Muslim students felt arrangements should be made however others disagreed and believed that academic life and religious commitments should be kept separate.

While the research above provides a useful understanding of the ways in which a university may or may not cater for the needs of Muslim students, the present research does not aim to directly explore such ideas. The studies mentioned above used surveys and relatively structured interview techniques to explore the views of Muslim students in higher education and by interpreting Muslim experiences of university as being measurable and quantifiable they fail to account for ways in which the university campus is embodied and experienced on an everyday basis by Muslim students. Indeed, the present research aims to access as far as possible what it means to be a Muslim and how they negotiate their identity in the higher education context. By applying a narrative approach, this research moves towards theorising the role cultural discourse surrounding the educational experience plays in the creation of identity rather than being limited by predefined ideas. Indeed, a qualitative research approach enables the exploration of the different ways British Muslims negotiate identity within higher education and offers a wide-ranging understanding of the subjective experience of British Muslims. Additionally, a narrative perspective will allow

exploration of the subtleties of how lives are lived and identity is constructed within social, cultural and discursive contexts, thus asserting that Muslims are not a homogenous group.

Much of the qualitative literature on Muslims is in relation to specific areas or topics of interest such as arranged marriages, careers, the wearing of the hijab as well as the subject of identity more generally, and is often framed through the issues of difference, belonging, integration and so on (see, for example Ahmed, 2001; Alexander, 2000; Dwyer and Shah, 2009; Lewis, 1994; 2007). While available literature draws on Muslim participation in post-compulsory education, it is often limited to young British Muslim women's experiences (e.g. Ahmad et al., 2003; Bagguley and Hussain, 2007; Mellor, 2011; Mohee, 2011). Particular interest has been paid to this cohort due to research indicating that there are considerable differences between the options available to boys and girls, as noted earlier (e.g. Bhatti, 1999; Basit, 1997), which can constrain future options, allowing certain things to be considered, and others prohibited. Due to essentialised assumptions, Muslim women are portrayed as being highly regulated, repressed, submissive and passive objects (Phillips, 2009), docile (Ramji, 2007), uninterested in education and destined for marriage (Bagguley and Hussain, 2014) or simply not allowed to participate in higher education compared to their male counterparts (Bagguley and Hussain, 2014; Modood, 2014; Phillips, 2009; Ramji, 2007). Indeed, academics have argued that it is inherently problematic to wholly blame the Asian Muslim community for such dominant representations of Muslim women in post-compulsory education and in order to understand such a trend, research must move beyond the 'victimology trend' and stop assuming Muslim women lack the agency and

liberty to forge alternative identities and negotiating their position within the complex struggle of being (Brah, 1993; Ramji, 2003; Shain, 2002). Therefore, the main objective of certain literature has been to challenge these ideas by arguing that such suggestions only feed the essentialised understanding of Muslim women (see Dwyer and Shah, 2009; Mohee, 2011).

This emerging literature foregrounding agency draws attention to the number of multifaceted and interconnected explanations as to why young South Asian Muslim women's participation in higher education has increased, and how it has provided a platform to enable the negotiation of constrained versions of Muslim womanhood and womanhood more generally, while enabling others to potentially develop more empowering identities. These explanations include social mobility, fulfilling parental ambitions for them, self-fulfilment and personal development, a 'safety net' in the face of unforeseen circumstances, avoiding or postponing marriage and using it as a means to facilitate a career (see Bagguley and Hussain, 2007; Mellor, 2011, Mohee, 2011). Research by Ahmed (2001), for example, suggests that parents play an important role in encouraging their daughters to succeed both academically and professionally. While a daughter's education brings 'prestigious capital', an educated daughter may also signify certain levels of 'liberalism' for the parents concerned. Furthermore, a daughter's education also endows a certain level of social 'education' on the rest of the family, and parents are, therefore, able to define themselves as 'modern' and socially astute (Ahmad, 2001).

Bagguley and Hussain (2014) challenge essentialised versions of Muslim womanhood as it does not take into account the decision making process with regards to the pursuit of higher education. They argue that 'choices' involve

negotiations that may conflict with issues such as subject choice, location and when to get married. They drew on Archer's (2007) theoretical work of reflexivity to determine the relationship between the individual and the social context in relation to young British South Asian women. Archer's (2007) theory focuses on three modes of reflexivity, entailing that there are different ways in which an individual structurally shapes their situation and wider circumstances; these are communicative reflexivity, autonomous reflexivity and meta-reflexivity. Bagguley and Hussain (2014) focus on communicative reflexivity and meta-reflexivity. Communicative reflexives are individuals whose actions require them to engage in conversation with others who are close to them and they can trust, before leading to courses of action. Meta-reflexives are individuals who are critically self-reflexive of their own situations and actions (Archer, 2007). Bagguley and Hussain (2014) demonstrate how young British South Asian women engage with these forms of reflexivity to resist, negotiate and compromise across intersecting identities. Similarly, others have drawn on Butler's (1990) theory of performativity to develop new understandings of how South Asian Muslim women's identities are constituted (e.g. Mohee, 2011; Siraj, 2012). According to Butler (1990), gender is not a fixed identity, but is rather a continual process of negotiation that varies and transforms depending on the cultural context. Mohee (2011) draws on Brah's (1996) concept of culture as a 'reiterative performance' and Butler's (1990) notion of 'gender identity as performance', to evaluate the ways in which young British South Asian Muslim women in her study were using the university space and paid employment to rework new gender identities and develop new insights and outlooks on marriage. Indeed, a principal finding that can be drawn from the reviewed literature on Muslim women is that they

construct higher education as an opportunity to forge new, alternative, empowering identities in comparison to the previous generation (Dwyer and Shah, 2009; Mohee, 2011). However, the subtleties of the ways in which lives are lived and identities are constructed within social, cultural and discursive contexts may be missed in generalisations made about the forging of new gender identities.

Moreover, approaches which locate identity within the context of reflexivity and performance obscure the opportunity to access the role structural categories such as class, gender, age and other markers of group identity, such as locale and, perhaps especially, race have on Muslim women's negotiation of their identity. While heterogeneity and individuals' negotiations were not ignored, the ways in which young South Asian women's experiences have been researched and conceptualised still run the risk of artificially imposing binary distinctions upon them, either as westernised women who are modern and educated or traditional women who are backwards and uneducated (Majumdar, 2007). Therefore, categorising women in relation to culture can impose 'stereotypes' and essentialist representation of young women's identities while undermining their active negotiations of different concepts of self. Indeed, as Brah (1993) and Dwyer and Shah (2009) suggest, in researching Muslim women, there is a risk of treating them as a category of discourse rather than historical subjects with differing social and personal biographies. The aim of the present research is, therefore, to deconstruct the essentialist conceptualisation of young British Muslim women and the forging of new gender identities, as it negates structural and social constraints and instead engages in an understanding of how lives

are lived and identities are constructed within a social, cultural and discursive and structural context.

However, in comparison, less is known about the motivation, identities, and experiences of young British Muslim men's participation in higher education. As outlined above available research has identified that Muslim males are frequently depicted as fanatical young men and demonised as a defiant group prone to violence and criminality (Alexander, 2000, 2004; Ramji, 2005). According to Archer (2003), it was after the Rushdie Affair that 'Asian' became synonymous with 'Muslim', which resulted in a negative association, characterised by negative images and stereotypes of British Muslims, in particular males. Muslim men are said to be presented in a polarised manner and are portrayed either as Islamic fundamentalists or involved in drug related crimes, both of which construct the male Muslim culture as being domineering and highly macho (Alexander, 2000). Furthermore, Muslim men are also labelled as controlling the freedom of the females in their communities and do it as a way to exercise patriarchal power (Macey, 1999; Ramji, 2005, 2007). Hopkins (2004; 2011) discussed the ways in which young Muslims men living in Scotland negotiated their national and religious identities and how they engaged in the political struggles of gaining respect and recognition. The research revealed that the informants wanted to challenge gendered stereotypes and assumptions based upon ethicised and religious discourses and desired to be recognised as well-mannered, respectable and valuable members of society. Against this backdrop, it is no surprise that British Muslim men have also been stereotyped within the educational sector and labour market: Muslim men are therefore more likely to be unemployed and if they are indeed employed, they

are often in jobs with the lowest wages and experience widespread discrimination (Brown, 2000; Dale et al., 2002; Modood et al., 1997).

Although the literature in relation to Muslim men's presence in Britain facilitates an understanding of their negotiation of broad social identities and is of some relevance to the present research, there is limited literature when it comes to understanding young Muslim men's negotiation of identities within a higher educational context. The exception is Dwyer et al.'s (2008) research centring on young Pakistani Muslim men's experiences within a university setting. Their study sought to understand the educational experiences of Pakistani Muslim men in post-compulsory education and found that while some men had a strong attachment towards fulfilling traditional gender roles, there were also informants who interpreted their role differently and were interested in negotiating new identities that challenged radicalised stereotypical understanding of Muslim men. Indeed, these findings were similar to the literature on Muslim women's experience of higher education, where Muslim women fashioned their pursuit of higher education as means to forge alternative and more empowering gendered identities. However, by drawing upon the reviewed literature it could be argued that Muslims were using the freedom university provided as a place to negotiate their identity, which could both enable and constrain identities, and therefore does not simply mean shaping new empowering identities.

Summary

A key area which enables a greater understanding of both young Muslim men and women's identities was the racialised discourses which promote stereotypical depictions of Muslim adulthood in the UK. Indeed, rather than

remaining embedded within such essentialist understandings, the present research intends to draw upon culture as being a process through which social meanings are produced and contested. It aims to move away from a static positioning as it is believed that such an understanding denies Muslims the agency to articulate their identities. This will be done by drawing on a 'narrated subject' approach as a way of avoid grouping identity into misleading definite entities. Indeed, it is through stories that we make sense of our lives and the 'narrative subject' approach allows us to make sense of the world and our place in it through narrative forms (Somers and Gibson, 1994). A narrative approach has the potential of enabling individuals to talk about their experiences using their own words and phrases which respects and retains their situated meaning frames (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). It is argued by Mishler (1986) that rather than suppress the interviewees' tendencies to 'tell stories' and resist efforts to fragment their experiences into thematic categories, the narrative approach has the potential to allow for the richness and complexities of experiences to be explored within subjects' narrative accounts. Indeed, while some of the literature mentioned has used biographical approaches to investigate how young British Muslims negotiate their identity in the context of higher education (e.g. Brah, 1993; Dwyer and Shah, 2009), a narrative approach has not been used previously to present a detailed analysis of how British Pakistani Muslims narrate their involvement in higher education and explore the implications this had for the construction of their identities. Therefore, the present research offers an alternative and more nuanced method to understand the ways in which an individual negotiates their identities and lived experiences.

In addition, a narrative approach recognises the multiplicity of possible subject positions which Muslims occupy and the ways in which their everyday self are considered in and 'through intersecting discourses, material practices and matrices of power embedded' in their everyday lives (Brah, 1996, pp. 159-160). A narrative framework will enable the exploration of the positioning available of Muslims and offer useful insights into different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning. This research, therefore also aims to look at the variation between and within accounts, with the understanding that there is no single version of the 'truth' and no one unitary subject. It attempts to identify points where the young men and women in the study draw upon and reproduce dominant discourses while also producing counter discourses to challenge leading assumptions and definitions and allows for an exploration of the relationship between agency and determinism. I also aim to highlight the ways in which representations can be contradictory and are not without problems, with emphasis placed on the gendered and 'racialised' nature of the discourses produced.

Research aims

The research aims to explore the lived experiences of young British Muslims in higher education at the University of Bradford: to understand young British Muslims involvement in higher education and explore the implications this has for the construction of their identities.

More specifically the research aims to:

1. understand the ways in which young Muslims participate in everyday university life:

2. to explore the accounts of Muslim student identities in the public and private sphere;
3. understand how young British Muslims negotiate their identity in relation to cultural narratives, as well as in and through particular places and moments;
4. explore young British Muslims complex everyday negotiations of gendered identities, by exploring the temporal and circumstantial nature of social relationships and identities;
5. challenge the popular assumption of a unitary, homogenised stereotype of British Muslim, by drawing upon a range of accounts and show how they may or may not 'fit' the existing dominant ideological constructions.

Chapter 2: Devising a Theoretical Framework

The aim of this chapter is to identify how the experiences of young British Muslims in higher education might best be understood. Current theory and past research highlighted in the literature review (see Chapter 1) posed several important questions which need to be addressed when developing a theoretical framework. It is central to the aims of this research that the framework implemented allows the lived experiences of Muslim students in higher education to be explored through the lens of their social and historical positions. According to Crotty (1998) the starting point of developing a theoretical framework is to identify the methodologies and methods that will be utilised as a means to fulfil the purpose of answering the question(s) posed by the research. It is also important to have an understanding of the kind of knowledge the data collected intends to generate when undertaking a project and devise a research process that is appropriate for this purpose.

By justifying the choice of methodologies and methods, the theoretical perspective, which is the philosophical underpinning of the research, forms a link between the theoretical aspects and practical workings of the research and draws upon the philosophical basis, nature and limits of human knowledge (Crotty, 1998). For that reason, the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the selected methodology had to be explored and made clear before the question(s) could be addressed. This chapter will begin by addressing the kind of knowledge made available within the theoretical framework adopted. It will move on to explore how identities are conceptualised by drawing upon developmental and social psychological constructs. It is

argued that traditional identity frameworks conceptualise notions of identity as a developmental and linear process, whereas postmodernist/poststructuralist theories challenge this understanding and instead place emphasis on the fluid, dynamic, performative nature of identity. Performativity highlights subjectivity, and draws upon a social constructionist epistemology and suggests that individuals construct and reconstruct identity through their actions and interactions with the social world.

A postmodern approach

As stated in the literature review (see Chapter 1) much of what has been written about British Muslims situates them as a homogenous group, therefore the approach taken must recognise diversity and multiplicity. Furthermore, it must facilitate an understanding that an individual's experience of higher education is historically and culturally specific, and does not privilege one experience or understanding over another.

It was evident during the early stages of the research design that a 'modernist' positivist approach was not applicable to the present research as it draws upon the assumption of a single discoverable truth. The modernist view is associated with realist ontology, a position that suggests that we should strive to understand the world from an objective point of view where progress towards attaining non-negotiable accurate knowledge is always possible (Ashworth, 2000). A modernist perspective would classify the experiences of a Muslim student in higher education as scientific, verifiable 'truths', therefore proposing that there is an essential 'Muslim' character that is measurable and quantifiable, which could possibly be defined by broad physiological, sociological or

psychological categories. Indeed, drawing upon positivist assumptions would be problematic as it would go against the assertion that Muslims are not a homogenous group. Subtle distinctions such as language, ethnicity, and caste as well as the experiences of gender challenge the very notion of uniformity of 'Muslims'. It would therefore be an incompatible philosophical underpinning to study this group of Muslims as being 'all the same' while ignoring the social and historical locations of individuals. Indeed, if the present research were to draw upon a positivist underpinning, there would be little room to explore the diverse ways British Muslims negotiate identity within higher education and it would not offer an inclusive understanding to the subjective experience of British Muslims.

An alternative to the modernist world view is the 'postmodern' world view which rejects the belief in scientific rationality, objectivity and truth (Charmaz, 1995). However, there is no unified postmodern theory or a coherent set of positions and it can therefore mean different things to different disciplines. Nevertheless, a broad understanding proposes that the world cannot be understood through single theories and meta-narratives and instead emphasis is placed on the 'co-existence of multiplicity and variety of situation dependent ways of life' (Burr, 2003, p. 12).

By rejecting the positivist assumption of objective truth, postmodern approaches commit to ambiguity, relativity, multiplicity, particularity and discontinuity of social life (Crotty, 1998). Postmodern approaches favour an understanding that human experience, including perception, is fragmented and historically and culturally mediated, suggesting that there are 'knowledges' rather than 'knowledge' (Ponterotto, 2002; Willig, 2013). Within a postmodern theoretical framework, there is no permanent self but many selves which are continuously

changing and negotiating boundaries amongst different parts of themselves as well as between themselves and others.

Constructing 'British Muslims'

The postmodern approach taken in the present research is located within a social constructionist epistemology, an assumption that a Muslim student is not objectively definable, or a predetermined entity waiting to be discovered, but rather is constructed through individuals' engagement with the social world. Indeed, if an objectivist epistemology were to have been used in the present research, it would assume meaning as being inherently positioned within the object being studied and recognise that properties of that object can be measured and discovered by verifying or challenging a hypothesis. This would therefore limit the research to discover the essences that reveal natural, universal laws of 'truth' within the bounds of probability (Nicholls, 2009). Indeed, the purpose of knowledge within objectivist epistemology is to clarify, predict and control (Grant and Giddings, 2002). However, it would be difficult to control variables when investigating social behaviour within the context of its environment as we are often limited due to core values and biases, cultural influences and provisional nature of knowledge and understanding (Crotty, 1998; Mertens, 1998). Therefore, irrespective of subjective rationalisation, the claim of an objective reality would embody a deterministic, essentialist understanding of British Muslims and their experiences.

By comparison, a social constructionist perspective can be comfortably applied to the social cultural world as the underlying assumption of constructionism is that meaning is not 'discovered' but 'constructed' (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). It rejects

the view of objective human knowledge, and posits that 'truth' is not waiting to be discovered (Crotty, 1998). It is the belief that a person's reality is incoherent and fragmented, therefore, suggesting that we have multiple identities, each of which comes about through social interaction between the individual and his or her surroundings through various semiotic means, primarily language.

By implementing a constructionist epistemology there is an opportunity to explore how young British Muslim students draw upon culturally available resources to fashion identity. This will give an understanding of the multiplicity of ways in which Muslim students' narrate their involvement in higher education and the implications this has on the construction of their identities. As such, a postmodernist philosophy and constructionist epistemology will provide theoretical context for research into interpretation of students' identities.

Conceptualising identity

In this section I draw on developmental and social psychological approaches to summarise the disciplinary origins of the study of identity. According to Erikson (1959) development occurs within eight distinct psychosocial stages, in which individuals address a series of crises to arrive at a healthy resolution to major development tasks. Genetic and environmental influences are highlighted as directly influencing the timing of development with the individual drawing upon past experiences and perspectives, ego, competencies, societal expectations, and future prospects to form an identity. As the individual progresses through the stages, it is argued that society places demands on them, which provoke an emotional crisis to which they must adapt. It is proposed that identity is not salient until adolescence and suggests the fifth stage in ego identity

development is a critical stage in the development of identity (Erikson, 1951, 1968). Within this model failure to resolve these psychosocial tasks results in an inevitable 'crisis', which plays an integral part in identity development. The identity crisis is resolved by advancing through the stages and reasserting control towards an eventual coherent self that brings one satisfaction and feelings of competence. Erikson (1959, 1968) theorises the development of identity as systematic rather than random, and suggests that a snowballing process occurs in accordance to a predetermined schedule.

One of the pertinent issues with this model is the description of identity as a stage based process, therefore assuming the lifespan as linear phenomena and although there is the possibility for a developing person to navigate back through earlier stages, the theory maintains a meticulous focus on the ways an individual makes sense of their identity development. Indeed, such an assertion draws upon a 'modernist' theoretical framework and would assume British Muslims will be on a straightforward, progressive, developmental path and therefore asserting homogeneity in the way young people in particular develop. As such, a deterministic approach will not offer a comprehensive insight to subjective experience of Muslim students. To conceptualise identity to be inherently natural and labelling it as a linear trajectory goes against the postmodern theoretical framework which challenges the notion that identity is fixed, stable, unified self and instead emphasise fragmentation, fluidity, and performativity (Gergen, 1991).

Another key perspective is a social psychological approach which conceptualises identity in relation to the feeling of belonging to a group. Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory is a social cognitive approach in

which identity is an abstraction of how individuals identify themselves and others with various social categories in relation to group membership. According to the theory, group membership provides an individual with a unique sense of having a distinct place in the social world (where they are positioned in relation to others). According to Tajfel and Turner (1979) social identities provide status and help maintain a positive sense of self by making cognitive, social comparisons between one's group and other relevant out-groups. This results in an increase in personal self-esteem due to the positive outlook of their social group membership (in-group) in distinction to the relevant comparison groups (out-groups).

However, Hogg and Abrams (1993) have challenged the significance of self-esteem as being the motivational force that drives an individual to engage in making social comparisons and argued that there was little empirical evidence to support the importance of positive distinctiveness in intergroup relations. They instead suggest that social identity may be linked to the desire for coherent self-conceptions and to construct meaning from the experiences of oneself and others (Hogg and Abrams, 1993). Self-categorisation Theory (Turner et al., 1987; Turner et al., 1994) builds on the basic assumption of Social Identity Theory and turns towards the concept of categorisation and, instead of interpersonal and intergroup dynamics being at opposite ends of a spectrum, they were regarded as dynamics operating at different levels of inclusiveness.

According to Self-categorisation Theory, the self is considered and conceptualised in social intergroup contexts (Hogg and Terry, 2000). When individuals identify closely with a social group, they develop a 'depersonalisation

of the self' (Hogg and Terry, 2000; Hogg et al., 1995). Self-categorisation theory suggests that individuals make distinctions between personal and social identities based upon (social) categories to which people belong. By doing so, social comparisons are made, where perceived similarities are highlighted between self and other in-group members, and perceived differences are made between self and out-group members. Self-categorisation determines whether others show differences or similarities to the self, such as shared values, beliefs or interpretations, in a specific context (Oldmeadow et al., 2003; Ran and Duimering, 2015). It is the differences that help us understand when a specific group or identity becomes salient (Friesen and Besley, 2013). Within a specific context, a person can have multiple identities, which also suggests one can shift between personal and group identities.

However, while these social psychological theories (i.e. Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Tajfel and Turner, 1979) incorporate identity multiplicity by noting that varied intergroup comparisons produce multiple identities, they also conceptualise identity as being static, stable and constant, and do not take into account the fluid nature of identity. For example, Hogg and Abrams (1988) view identities as discrete, identifiable categories which do not necessarily overlap, thus providing homogenised social identifications. Therefore, such theories will not be applicable to the present study as its social constructionist epistemological underpinning conceptualises identity as being fragmented, with a predisposition to shift contextually and over time, where structure and agency intersect. This is because within a postmodernist and constructionist framework identity cannot be conceptualised into separate categories, as identity is seen as negotiable, multiple and contradictory (Burr, 2003). Moreover, it is through

agentic engagement with the social world that young people are able to negotiate personal identities which intersect with wider social structures.

Although social identity approaches do not specifically address ethnic identity directly, much of the research on ethnic identity has been based on the study of group identity by social psychologists where they attempt to apply the principle nature of such theories to study ethnicity (e.g., Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Ethnic identity has been defined as the ethnic component of an individual's social identity, as explained by Tajfel (1981) it is:

‘that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.’
(p. 255)

The term ‘ethnic’ in social identity research refers to ethnic groups and ethnic identity and draws upon the ways in which it affects majority, minority and group status on social identity process and in terms of minority group members’ in-group and out-group preferences. Social and developmental psychologists consider ethnic identity as one of the many characteristics of an individual's social identity (Sellers et al., 1998). In an attempt to study ethnic identity formation, Phinney (1989) drew upon Marcia's (1980) conceptualisation of Erikson's (1968) ego identity model, and examined commonalities across various models of ethnic identity formations. Indeed, Marcia (1980) expanded on Erikson's work and the term ‘stages’ was replaced with ‘statuses’, as ‘stages’ was criticised for representing identity as a state that is rigid, constant and definite, whereas ‘statuses’ drew on the process an individual goes through in

order to internalise ways of seeing the self (Marcia, 1966). However, while these terminologies take into account exploration, referents and commitment, both have been criticised for focussing primarily on the simplistic understandings of internal psychological processes and ignoring the more complex social-contextual factors through which identity is formed (van Hoof, 2001; Côté and Schwartz, 2002). Indeed, a generalised model misses subtleties of how life is lived and identity is construction in relation to cultural, social and discursive contexts. A stage model of ethnic identity development was proposed for members of all ethnic groups in which individual's progress through a period of exploration to the point whereby they understand and accept their ethnicity, at which point identity is considered to be 'achieved' and ethnic identity issues resolved. Phinney (1989) described the stages as followed:

- 'Identity diffusion': whereby there is a lack of interest or concern for ethnicity.
- 'Foreclosure': where views of ethnicity are based on opinions of others.
- 'Moratorium': this involves an exploration and desire to seek an understanding of own ethnicity.
- 'Identity Achievement': through exploration, an individual achieves a secure, clear understanding and acceptance of own ethnicity.

An 'achieved' identity, where ethnic identity issues have been resolved, is considered the most desirable for healthy development and is often associated with high self-esteem and self-acceptance (Phinney and Alipuria, 1990). However, similar to the criticism of Erikson's stage based model, marking development through a linear developmental trajectory reduces identity to a

fixed, quantifiable entity and does not address the subtleties, fluidity and negotiation experienced by minority group members. Moreover, by homogenising ethnic identity, the lived experiences of a marginalised group are largely ignored and remain too simplistic to capture the nuances and complex processes of negotiation throughout the life course. Indeed, reality is defined by individuals and groups of individuals, and people make an effort to present themselves and their version of events in such a way that will prevail over other versions. According to Burr (2003) this is linked to power, in that it is the most powerful who are successful at having their version of events predominate. Therefore suggesting that people are agents of change and social constructionist approaches have the potential to explore power as being interdependent within a complex network of structures and dynamics rather than accepted as a linear experience. For that reason, the theories mentioned thus far lack the complex and dynamic understandings of how these identity processes interact and within group differences. Indeed, the lack of complexity leads to the problem of homogenising groups and an essentialist understanding fails to analyse the ways in which subjectivity operates in the lives of individuals.

In order to understand fragmented, fluid and performative nature of identity, the concept of intersectionality will be drawn upon. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1994, 2005) departs from the dominant theories discussed above emanating from social and developmental psychology indicating that identity formation is fixed, or an inevitable series of stages or statuses. It also offers a useful way of understanding how intersections between race, class and gender constitute an individual's construction of identity.

The theoretical foundation for intersectionality arose from Black feminist thought in response to the limitations of mainstream feminism (e.g. Mullings, 1997; Nakano-Glenn, 1999). Although intersectionality has moved on from its original usage, its core offering remains consistent, in that it critiques social theories which attempt to understand the differences through additive or parallel models (Nash, 2009). According to intersectionality we do not have a single dimension of experience, nor separate social experiences in 'discrete' and 'pure' strands' but rather intersecting identities are defined in relation to one another (Brah and Phoenix, 2004). As Brah and Phoenix, (2004) write:

'We regard the concept of 'intersectionality' as signifying the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts.' (p. 76)

In other words, identity is not experienced as distinct attributes, but as a subjective, fragmented, set of dynamics (e.g., Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983; Collins, 1990). The concept of intersectionality will allow for the exploration of the experiences of students in higher education within a changing social world as it recognises that individual identities exist within and draw from a framework of socially defined statuses, some of which are more salient than others in specific situations or mediated by their historical and cultural locations (Burr, 2003; Willig, 2013). More recently, intersectionality has become the predominate way in which to conceptualise how individuals occupy complex and dynamic social locations, where specific identities can be more or less salient depending on their socio-political-historical context (Choo and Ferree, 2010). From an intersectional perspective, social categories are historically

located and socially constructed and while in traditional theories (i.e. Erikson, 1959; Phinney, 1989) they were seen as being static; within an intersectional framework social categories are constantly constructed and reconstructed (Staunaes, 2003).

Indeed, the intersectionality framework is consistent with postmodern thinking, as within the social constructionist understanding identity is multifaceted and complex and is contingent upon the self-sustaining social, political and ideological contexts (Friedman, 1995). Therefore, intersectionality will be a useful tool to conceptualise identity as being fluid. This will allow for the understanding of the intricate, multi-layered dimensions of experiences and the layered understanding of individuals' lives which facilitate the construction and positioning of 'selves' through discursive action both in the public and private sphere. It will also increase understanding by examining how different identities are constructed through complex and dynamic social process and practices that position groups differently in society (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Yuval-Davis, 2006). As Bhopal and Preston (2011, p. 1) argue 'intersectionality becomes a defining feature of "otherness"'. 'Otherness' is related to the fragmented nature of identity and an intersectionality model will enable the research to capture the dynamic realities of lived experiences. It is suggested that key elements of our social identity are best understood at their points of assemblage, so that the ways in which different systems of the social layers integrate might be acknowledged, better understood, and addressed. Indeed, as illustrated earlier in the chapter, the present research does not aim to explore accounts in a realist way or focus on describing objective realities, as 'truth is not the point' (Silverman, 2000, p122). The personal accounts which informants share in this

research are temporary, situated accounts, specific to the context in which they were produced. Therefore, on another occasion, or with a different audience, a different account of the same incident might be given because tales are co-constructed; memories are unpredictable and the telling a story the first time round may change the narrator. Indeed according to Gergen and Gergen (1983) the social constructionist framework maintains that meanings and understandings are born out of a co-construction of events, negotiated through social interaction and achieved through social consensus. Thus meanings constantly evolve in relation to the social context of a given interaction in which they emerge (Gergen and Gergen, 1983). Therefore, in the present research, it is argued that the narrative is negotiated between the researcher and the researched, and thus the story is a socially constructed **phenomenon** dependent upon the questions and analysis of data.

The present research aims to explore how students in higher education understand and make sense of their identities by resisting the notion that identity is a developmental linear process or static social one and instead emphasises the dynamic and performative nature of identity. The notion of performativity highlights the subjective nature of identity and proposes that individuals construct and reconstruct identity through their actions, which are not essentialist and shift depending on context. Within positioning theory (Davies and Harrè, 1990), it is theorised that positions can be taken up, constructed and resisted, therefore people are said to constantly adopt and defend their positions and accept or confront the positions of others. Harré and Van Langenhove (1999) define positioning as the “assignment of fluid ‘parts’ or ‘roles’ to speakers in the discursive construction of personal stories”. A person

can assume a certain position or a position can be imposed on that person. It is through social interactions that positions are made available. Individuals are able to resist or reject a positioning in favour of other alternate positions, therefore comprehending the strategies that individuals employ in order to generate new or alternative identities.

Indeed, the importance of identity construction as an active, everyday process that an individual engages in also draws attention to the ways in which people engage in projects of resistance to everyday life, pointing particularly to the emergence of various discourses which people draw upon to position themselves, within, and against society and culture. Within this perspective, identity construction is interwoven with broader social structures and by engaging in identity work people often resist their 'present' reality through the construction of competing, alternative realities. One of the key aims of the present research is to therefore understand the ways in which young people position themselves and others and the resources they draw upon to construct their identities while also countering or aligning themselves with various dominant discourses.

By drawing on and applying positioning theory the complexity of identities as a fluid, fragmented and dynamic concept can be valued and understood. It is argued that people are continuously involved in a process of positioning and repositioning both in relation to other people and also to the 'self' (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Positioning theory prompts the possibility for choice and agency due to the wide range of potential identities with the discourses available at any one point in time.

The concepts of intersectionality and positioning theory have the potential to bring the nuances of identity negotiation and theory together and to explore the complexities of identity and access an individual's subjective understandings in contemporary times. Indeed, the present research aims to explicitly address the social categories and contexts in which individuals are situated and to explore social identities and their intersections. Certainly, the concept of intersectionality informs us that all subjects are 'doing' more than one social category at a time and the theory of positioning makes it clear that an actor will both be positioned and positions oneself and others. An approach which draws on both components will enable an attempt to capture the complex nature of an individual by drawing upon and emphasising both social identities and the intersecting spheres of identity and social development, thus capturing the 'postmodern subject'. The concept of intersectionality and positioning theory are ideal as they will move beyond the understanding that an individual's lived experience is fixed in a single location, and will instead draw upon identities that intersect.

Indeed, as stated in the literature review, sociological theories and research (see Modood, 2014; Shah et al., 2010; Bagguley and Hussain, 2007, 2014; Mellor, 2011) drew on ethnic and social capital to interpret why and how South Asian (specifically Pakistani) parents and community socialise their children to understand the importance of education and encourage participation. This is in line with Erikson's (1968) theory on the development of identity, which emphasised the role of parents in shaping their children's identity by sharing beliefs, values, norms and behaviour. However, while Erikson's theory draws on a psychological understanding of the construction of identity, it also suppresses

individuals' tendencies to tell stories and fragments their experiences into thematic categories. In order to gain a subjective understanding of how young British Muslims engage with higher education, the narrative approach is far more appropriate as it has the potential to allow the richness and complexities of experiences to be explored (see Mishler (1986). Moreover, unlike developmental stage theorists, the narrative approach understands identity as a life-long process, in that an individual continuously constructs their identity through their interaction with the social world (McAdams, 1993).

Summary

Within this chapter it was argued that the ontological and epistemological position adopted in the research will influence 'what can be known' about young British Muslims within the university context. This chapter considered traditional identity frameworks such as developmental and social psychological approaches to conceptualise notions of identity. However, it also discussed that such modernist, linear theoretical perspective might limit the potential of the research by the assumption that progress is always possible and that 'truth' can be discovered and attained (Crotty, 1998) and instead emphasis was placed on the fluidity, dynamic, performative nature of identity. Therefore, a social constructionist epistemology is offered as being more relevant to the aims of the research as it draws on the understanding that identity is multiple and fragmented in nature and is negotiated and renegotiated through our interaction with the social world (Gergen, 2009). The concept of intersectionality and positioning theory are considered useful in exploring the social and cultural context of lived experiences of British Muslims. The present research believes that the concept of intersectionality and theory of positioning will enable the

exploration of how subjectivity is created through multiple discourses and examine the ways in which young British Muslim within the university context negotiate the different positions made available. Moreover, they will reveal how these positionings are embedded in complex power relations, hence the value of the intersectional approach. Moreover, the intersectionality approach will also help identify and theorise the internal discrepancies and the heterogeneity of lived experiences in the narratives of young British Muslims.

Chapter 3: Phase One - Developing the ethnographic

methodology

The aim of this chapter is to explore the methodological approach that underpins the research process and to provide a rationale for the methods and techniques utilised for data collection. This research adopted a pluralistic mixed method phased approach, in which two different qualitative methods (ethnographic observation and narrative interviews) were used. Frost (2011) proposed that the combination of different qualitative approaches can extend our understanding of a phenomena being researched by offering a range of readings and interpretations. Phase one of the research included qualitative ethnographic observations which were carried out at the University of Bradford City Campus and aimed to identify the ways in which young Muslims participate in everyday university life and how they presented themselves within the university space. Phase two included narrative interviews which aimed to understand how students negotiated their identity as Muslims in Britain within the higher educational contexts and provide an insight into the manner by which they negotiated their identity between the educational and public sphere and their family settings (see Chapter 1). This chapter will outline phase one of the research project, paying particular attention to the method utilised and the value it can bring to understanding the experiences of British Muslims in higher education.

This chapter will begin by offering an account of the preliminary observations that took place prior to approaching potential informants. Indeed, the very early stages of the research phase were spent getting to know the 'culture' of the

chosen observational spaces and making decisions on the appropriate times to observe and collect relevant data. It will also consider the ethical implications inherent in the research design that were outlined and required by the University of Bradford and the British Psychological Society. The preconceived notions and assumptions I held prior to entering the field and in relation to my role in the research will also be outlined. In addition, the negotiations that took place to ensure that I fully immersed myself into the social worlds of others and the impact this had will be drawn upon.

The chapter also includes a discussion in relation to the strategies that were implemented in order for the research to gradually become more focussed as my time in the field progressed. I will then give a detailed description of how the data was recorded and organised. The subsequent section will draw upon the assumptions that encourage researchers to 'validate' qualitative findings and I will argue that generalisability and transferability is not the aim rather it is up to the reader to make a judgement on how applicable my findings might be to other settings from the detailed account given. Finally, I will give a comprehensive account of how Emerson et al's (2000) analytical framework was used to process, code and analyse the fieldnotes.

Observing, exploring and entering the field

The participation observation initially began with passive participation as it is argued to allow the researcher to be at the scene of any action but not to participate or interact with other people, thus acting as a spectator (Spradley, 2016). This is considered to be a vantage point for the researcher before deciding to enter the field as a participant observer (Spradley, 2016). Indeed,

this method was appropriate during the very early stage of ethnographic observations as a way to facilitate an understanding of the setting and to see if they were appropriate in helping to interpret the cultural rules students followed.

As a student at the University of Bradford, I was already familiar with the campus arrangement and design. My observations were restricted to locations in the City Campus due to research practicalities and constraints. I began the fieldwork by visiting the popular spaces that I knew students occupied and decided to focus my attention on two main 'social space' areas on campus for data collection: Student Central and the Atrium. Student Central consists of three storeys and is home to the University of Bradford Student's Union, a space that is described on the university website as *'the heart of activity for students on campus'*. The Centre is a student-led space located close to the library and was designed for social learning, self-development and student activities. The space includes career development services, disability services, the counselling service and the student radio station (RamAir). In addition the space allows students to socialize, showcase their work, take part in volunteering activities and get involved with the various different student societies. There is a café and shop located on the first floor and there are a range of bars and entertainment areas located on the ground floor. In comparison, the Atrium is located in Richmond Building, the largest building on City Campus and is a university-led space used by students and academic staff and is promoted as a space for quiet socialising. It is used for eating and drinking, as well as reading, private study and informal meetings. Indeed, both areas chosen have similar uses, though differ in terms of size, shape and marketing of the spaces. During the couple of months spent observing student

activity and behaviour, it appeared that students were often more inclined towards the Student Central than the Atrium. This may have been due to marketing of the spaces as Student Central is regarded as the hub for student activity which students may have wanted be part of. However, regardless of student behaviour, I spent an equal amount of time in each for the purpose of this study to enable a range of observations and discussions. There were additional spaces which could have been included in the ethnographic observations due to the relatively high number of students who occupied the space. For example, the seating area outside the library was considered, however because students were in constant motion as they moved in and out of the library, it would not have been convenient to stop and engage in conversation. I also considered the Prayer Room but it was decided that approaching students in such a space would have been obtrusive. Finally, though the Atrium Restaurant was recognised as part of the Atrium floorplan, it was understood that individuals were using the space to have their lunch and I decided that my presence would have disrupted them as they made a stop between lectures.

The preliminary observations involved observing how the chosen spaces were used by students and making decisions on the most appropriate times to carry out the observations. This was in accordance with Coffey (1999) who contended that the initial observations are conceptualized as the 'orientation' phase of the research. This phase was used to understand the culture of a particular field but also the researcher's relationship with it and with the research informants. From the outset of the ethnographic observational phase, the mid-afternoon period was initially considered to be the most appropriate

time to gather data, as it was assumed that both the chosen spaces would be occupied by a diverse number of students. However, this time period was later recognised as being impractical due to the lunch time rush which meant both spaces consisted of a high number of students, and thus resulted in a lot of noise and distractions. Therefore, it was decided that it would not be suitable to spend time trying to engage with students more personally as they were either distracted due to the noise, socialising or simply having their lunch between lectures. Nevertheless, the lunch period was an ideal time to observe student behaviour and activity initially:

Field notes: Student Central

13th February 2012, 12.00pm

Today I carried out my first set of passive observations. I arrived at Student Central at 11am, just before the lunch time rush. Student Central consists of three floors, each floor caters for the various different needs of the students on campus. I was sat in the Union Mall; this is an open space consisting of a coffee outlet, a shop, and the university radio station 'Ramair' as well as the University of Bradford Student Union offices. I spent the afternoon observing group dynamics and making note of what I saw. As the lunch hour rush started, it got really busy and I have decided it wouldn't be the best time to observe because of the constant noise interference and everyone just seems a little too busy to be approached. This might change and I will go back during the lunch time but will also try out other times during the day as well. But just from sitting there for a couple of hours, it became obvious that a lot of students were

more likely to be sitting with individuals from their own ethnic group. For example, I noticed how a Pakistani student's social group was more likely to consist of other Pakistanis or Black students were more likely to engage with people from the same ethnic group.

Indeed, the excerpt above was the beginning of my understanding of Muslim students' social groups and surroundings and I spent a couple more days as a passive participant before I decided to approach informants. Upon approaching them, I would introduce myself and the research, and asked potential informants whether they were interested in participating. Those who showed interest were given information about the research and verbal consent was acquired in order to observe their behaviour, conversations and take part in discussions, while also allowing me to ask questions about what they are doing and why, thus moving up the scale of involvement. However, prior to beginning the process of collecting data, ethical implications were considered and identified, which will be discussed in further detail below.

Ethical implications

During the research design ethical implications were considered, and implemented, as required by the University of Bradford and the British Psychological Society (BPS) (2010). The BPS Code of Conduct (2012) was designed to regulate the relations of researchers to the people and fields they intend to study. Ethical consideration enables research to take into account the needs and interests of the informants and allows for steps to be taken to establish positive and respectful relationships whilst in the 'field'. It is now widely accepted that in all social research there is a need for ethical issues to be

considered which aim to protect the dignity, welfare and the rights of those who are willing to take part in a study (Flick, 2006).

Permission to observe informants was granted by University of Bradford's Humanities, Social and Health Sciences Research Ethics Panel. What follows is a detailed account of the ethical issues that were considered and how they were applied during my time in the field while also bearing in mind my role within the research process. In the first instance, in order for the research to progress, informed consent was required from the individuals I wanted to observe in the field. Therefore, a participant invitation and information sheet was developed (see Appendix 1) that outlined the aims of the research, why they had been invited to participate, what the research involved, and what would happen to the information after their participation and upon finishing the project. When an individual or a group of people was approached in the field, I would begin by introducing myself and outline my research area. As the researcher, it was my duty to safeguard the integrity of the process by ensuring that the informant gave their consent to participate and understood that their participation was voluntary. This involved giving a detailed and accessible appreciation of what their involvement would entail. Potential informants were provided with an invitation and information sheet which I would go through with them, while allowing for any questions.

Due to the real time nature of these observations it was not possible to give potential informants 24 hours to make a decision as to whether to participate. In addition, no audio or video recordings were made during my time in the field, and fieldnotes were the only means by which data was collected and recorded.

Once potential informants understood what their involvement entailed, they were asked to provide verbal consent to confirm their participation. It was decided that verbal consent would allow for a much smoother access to the informants and, depending on the group size, it would not have been practical to obtain written consent. Furthermore, BPS guidelines state that written consent is not required 'where those observed would expect to be observed by strangers' (BPS, 2012).

Certainly, it is recognised that consent is an ongoing process that may require re-negotiation throughout the data collection (de Laine, 2002). Therefore during the observation I made sure informants understood that they were being observed and the type of information that was being recorded about them, while also making sure they were happy to continue. At the end of the observation I reminded the informants that their participation was voluntary and reconfirmed that they were happy for the data to be used as part of the research. Once an observation was complete, informants were reminded of the option to withdraw and could contact me via email for further information or questions regarding the research. It was essential that informants understood that their participation was voluntary and were free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason, particularly if the information being shared was considered personal. Indeed, this had the potential of becoming a little difficult when interactions took place amongst a large group of individuals, where everyone in the group had given their informed consent. However, this did not mean that I could not continue with such observations and if an informant did make the decision to withdraw from the observation, I would take the opportunity to reassure them that any

information they shared would not be included in the write up of fieldnotes or during the analysis of the data.

Indeed, steps were also taken to protect the identity of the informants and as mentioned earlier informants were made aware of these issues prior to the observation taking place. Additionally, in order to address anonymity, each informant was allocated a pseudonym and any information that could make them easily identifiable was removed during the transcribing stage. Following the observation, field notes were transcribed and informants were advised that hard copies of transcripts were kept in a locked cabinet in the University's research office and all electronic copies were stored on a password protected computer at the University.

Negotiating the 'insider-outsider' status

Prior to entering the field I realised that I had many pre-conceived notions and assumptions of what to expect. I drew upon on perceived shared commonalities such as language and culture, and therefore assumed the informants and I would have shared experiences despite being raised in different families. I understood that certain aspects of social categories such as gender, ethnicity gave me an insider's perspective which was shaped by the heard, unheard and often incomplete stories about 'Muslims in Britain' which displayed the benefits of being an insider. I was however concerned that my closeness to the culture may result in me being inherently biased and that the sameness had the potential to cause inadequate curiosity to nurture challenging questions. I reflect upon my concerns in the excerpt below:

Field notes: My Office

29th November 2011, 3.00pm

I received my ethical approval today but I am hesitant to enter the field. I don't suspect that it'll be easy but I keep questioning whether my voice and understanding of the research will take precedence when it comes to analysing and interpreting the experiences of the students that I am going to be observing particularly when I am already making assumptions on what I think I will find.

The excerpt indicates that I was mindful of my insider knowledge and this heightened my awareness of the possible challenges and/or negative implications on the presentation and interpretation of the informant's experience. At the time I assume that remaining an objective 'outsider' would be an informal task and that it would not interfere with the intimate understanding of the individuals being observed. However, in hindsight, and through experience within the field and further reading this was later rationalised as being an unsuitable position due to the nature of my familiarity and understanding of the group being observed. Therefore, it was later decided that it would be of more benefit to more fully immerse myself than originally intended in the collection of field data. Consequently, steps were taken to ensure that I was fully involved in the process of data collection and these steps are outlined in detail below.

As a member of the group being researched, I was conscious of my 'insiderness' and aware that words like 'we', 'us' and 'our' were being used as part of the everyday language during the observations and interviews. However,

while this use of language indicated that as a group 'we' may have spoken about facing similar challenges, experiences and restraints, it was problematic to assume that our constructions of events and experiences were the same. Particularly as the philosophical underpinning of the research challenges the homogenous understanding of British Muslims. Indeed, while I may have been an insider, my use of 'we' was often in relation to the broader issues that related to British Muslims presence in the UK. But when it came to stories shared, it was understood that each individual's construction of identities is dependent upon their interactions with the social world. Therefore, while the use of 'we/them' may have been a problematic choice of words, it did not mean that I had to continue to remain reflexive with what was being shared and also acknowledge that a shared Muslim identity did not mean that there was no diversity in our experiences.

However, I will begin my research journey by highlighting the feeling of uneasiness experienced early in the research. This apprehension was due to informants showing interest in the research due to their expectation that as an 'insider' I would portray their stories an honest manner. Indeed, the aim of the research was to provide an understanding of a specific cohort of individuals (young Muslim students), however, my concerns were based on the responsibility I felt with regards to how potential informants positioned me, particularly as they indicated that they did not see me as a researcher but rather a close group member, who they considered would better understand their stories than a non-Muslim researcher.

The excerpt above draws upon my initial concerns at the beginning of the data collection and due to this, it seemed appropriate to begin the data collection by

positioning myself as an 'ignorant outsider', as recommended by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995). The rationale for taking up this position was due to the notion that over-familiarity with the culture being observed would prevent the 'process of enlightenment' and a deeper understanding of the informant's social world (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Lofland and Lofland, 1995). According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) in order to achieve eventual understanding, one must dissociate from personhood and knowledge, as being an outsider has the potential to permit the researcher to pose original research questions and capture the complexities of social life and therefore increase the analytical value of the data collected. Indeed, at the onset of data collection, over-familiarity was perceived as a problem rather than a strength and thus as an aspirant ethnographer it appeared to be more beneficial to cultivate a sense of strangeness. This meant attempting to distance myself from the pre-existing knowledge, experience of the culture and people being observed while also attempting to maintain 'objectivity' due to the argument that 'insider' knowledge may potentially affect the 'validity' of data. Indeed, the term 'validity' is questionable in qualitative research (see Lincoln and Guba 1985) and will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. I also critique the understanding of 'objective' knowledge and recall how my approach to the research altered.

My early role in the field meant attempting to be an 'outsider' entering into an 'insider's' world (Coffey, 1999). According to Pitman (2002, p. 285) insider knowledge can make available an 'illusion of sameness' which could have a consequence for the analytical process. Indeed, this was not a simple task as I will discuss in detail later, however, as I gained in experience I began to understand that one cannot disregard knowledge of a group, particularly if you

are a member of the group you have chosen to observe. Though, at the outset it was assumed it would be a simple matter of remaining neutral and detached from what I was seeing and hearing. Indeed, this was an unsustainable position to take as a researcher can nearly always find some shared subject position or shared experience that would prevent them from being considered a complete outsider.

The very early stages of the ethnographic observations involved trying to find my feet, to identify the most appropriate time to observe, the best way to introduce the research, and the various different exercises to help build rapport seamlessly. I was aware of previous research that suggested that Muslims may become apprehensive about being researched as they often felt that they were being 'targeted' (e.g. Mythen, 2009; Bhatti, 2011). As a result, prior to entering the field, I did not assume a shared identity would increase rapport, trust or lead to interest in the research and indeed, once I entered the field I encountered a mixture of suspicion and interest regarding the research. As expected with any research, there were some students who stated that they did not wish partake in the research and their decision was respected. However, there were many instances throughout ethnographic phase where there was an immediate interest once I had introduced the research:

Field notes: Student Central

15th February 2012, 11.30am

I entered Student Central just before noon. I bought myself a coffee and noticed a group of three people sitting close to the University of Bradford Union offices. At first I was hesitant to approach them, so I took a moment

to gather my thoughts and to build up the courage to talk to them. I eventually made my way towards them and introduced myself. 'Hi, my name is Ifsa Hussain and I am a postgraduate student at the University of Bradford. I am conducting a research study as part of my PhD. The aim of my research is to conduct an in depth study of the experiences of young British Muslim students...' and before I was able to finish introducing myself, a student sitting opposite me interrupted and said: 'That sounds really interesting. What have you found out?' To which I replied, 'I have just started to collect the data...' and without hesitation another group member asked, 'So, what would you like to know? I've always liked this kind of research. Do you want to interview me?' This was encouraging and I suddenly felt at ease, and said 'Before we get started, could you just confirm you are students at the University of Bradford and are a Muslim.'

The excerpt above indicates how some students showed interest and willingness to share their narratives. Indeed, it was rapidly found that a considerable number of students enthusiastically volunteered to participate in the research and the interest often appeared to be rooted from their desire to 'tell their story' to someone who they felt understood their 'struggles' of being a British Muslim. It could be argued that for many, taking part in the research meant an opportunity to define their selves and contradict the narratives that have been presented about them through various different media outlets. Indeed, this feeling of shared understanding was identified as enabling the building of rapport and the increased interest in the research meant embracing and accepting the 'insider' status. In doing so would only enhance the

progression of the research, rather than diminish the value of the stories being shared and collected. I reflect upon this in the excerpt below:

Field notes: Student Central

20th February 2012, 5:40pm

I entered Student Central just after 3pm. My initial worries about data collection seemed to have vanished because whenever I have approached students over the past couple of days, they have been very inviting and open with their responses to my questions. Students appear to be grateful that someone who understands them is able to give a platform to get their voices heard. For example, today a student named Rashid (pseudonym) said: 'I'm glad one of 'us' is doing the research.' I was intrigued by his openness and questioned what he meant by this, to which he responded, 'well, you know how it is...you always read stuff in the news about Muslims and they always focus on the small minority with exaggerated aspects that make it look like we have it in for the rest of the world. You know...they always make us look like we're not civilized people and we don't have place in society.' His friend, Haroon interrupted and added, 'we're always told by Imams at the mosque not to talk to anyone, especially the newspapers because even when we give a simple answer to a question, it's manipulated a million different ways and we are again shoved on the front page with headlines telling everyone of another bad thing we've done or said. So yeah, I mean, I wouldn't normally agree to talking to you because I'm cautious but like Rashid said, we trust that you're not going to do that because you're one of us and you

understand...you know how it is and you'll be able to show the good that we do and what our beliefs actually are.' It became clear that being a Muslim and approaching them made them more comfortable with my research agenda and that they may have rejected my invitation to take part in the research had I not been a Muslim.

Additionally, during the observations, my hijab (head covering) was a recognisable feature that identified me as a Muslim and led informants to assume other shared commonalities, such as culture and language. My acceptance as an insider in the way outlined in the above excerpt generally led to the building of trust and increased rapport. According to Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) being part of a culture at the start of a research project is of benefit as it enables access to key informants and does not require negotiations that an outsider is expected to conduct. Zinn (1979) also suggested that a marginalised group accept an 'insider' researcher as someone who has a better and distinct understanding of their social reality. This approval allows the researcher to break down the barriers which are usually formed as a result of informants' previous experiences with outsiders from the dominant culture. Indeed, there were many instances, like the one described in the excerpt above when informants explicitly stated that they trusted that I would do justice to their words and would offer a 'truthful' representation of who they are. This could have been due to the belief that I had a better understanding of certain facets of the cultural phenomena that 'outsiders' or dominant groups may not have understood. As the early observations took shape, it became evident that my 'insiderness' was central to the research, especially when it came to attaining a deeper level of trust with the informants. This is in accordance with Haniff's

(1985) observations, where it was found that the attainment of informants' trust was prevented and they were more likely to become defensive when an outsider entered their social world.

Naturally, I was grateful for the level of confidence placed in me to present their stories in an 'honest' and 'truthful' manner. However, I also remember feeling a great amount of pressure which I reflect upon in the excerpt below. I was often confronted with statements such as, *'I'm only taking part because I feel I can trust that you'll give an honest version on what Muslims are really all about because you're one of us'*. However, there were moments of hesitation due to the expectation of making sure I presented the informants in the research in an overall 'positive' manner. This marked an increasing uneasiness around the politics of interpretation and representation.

Field notes: Atrium

23rd February 2012, 4.30pm

I did not anticipate that my access to students would be as simple as introducing myself and sitting down next to them and starting a conversation. It hasn't taken as much effort as I initially thought it would and I am feeling a lot more positive with regards to further interactions in the field. But I find it concerning when the participants tell me how happy they are with me being 'one of them' which I understand to be a good thing but the trust they have in me appears to be founded on the belief that I'll give an honest or rather positive interpretation of them. While I understand their concerns of the representation of Muslims, my research wants to understand what it means to be a Muslim, which may include aspects

some may not agree with. I can't and don't want to misrepresent my participants and the priority is to remain true to my research endeavor. My concern is whether the participants will agree with my interpretation of the findings and whether they will be an accurate interpretation.

I began to reflect on my early position of wanting to remain objective, which meant attempting to experience and treat the already familiar as though from a bird's eye view. However, by informants revealing that they had accepted me as an insider, the desire to remain 'objective' began to appear misleading and I became mindful of my role in the interpretative process. Indeed, there was somewhat of an increased discomfort around 'truthful' interpretation and representation. However, if I continued to take on an objective stance, it meant that I was not being true to the research's epistemological assumptions of social constructionism. As noted in the theoretical chapter (see Chapter 2) the social constructionist perspectives recognises 'truth' and all meaningful reality as being dependent upon human practices and created by individuals' interaction with the world (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, in relation to the current research, it implies that there will be diverse perspectives on a particular topic or subject and as a result of different interpretations there will be multiple understandings of how certain issues regarding the Muslim students' experience appear to different people. Thus highlighting that meanings and understandings are created through social interactions, and are therefore co-constructed, which in turn involves the construction and reconstructed of knowledge that are negotiated in relation to the researcher's questions and the informants' answers.

Hence, attempting to justify myself as a 'stranger' would have been unrealistic, as Coffey (1999) indicates, fieldwork involves the performance of social roles and relationships which place the self at the heart of the research. It was necessary to acknowledge that the ethnographic research process involves 'co-construction' of knowledge between the researcher and the informants (see Chapter 2). Such a perspective allows the researcher to conduct research 'with' rather than 'on' the group or domain of interest, which is in contrast with outsider research perspectives. Furthermore, Garner (1975) states that the researcher should acknowledge their own values and prejudice at the beginning of the research endeavour while also being aware that they are embedded in their experience of knowledge formation and their epistemological value. This phase of the research design was not an experiment, but rather it involved being present at the scene. Therefore, continuing to adopt a stance of complete strangeness would have been impracticable as it meant denying the 'situatedness' of self as part of the cultural setting (Coffey, 1999).

Indeed, the preliminary positioning of self was challenged a number of times during the very early stages of the ethnographic observations. I had entered the field with assumptions and pre-conceived notions of what I was expecting to find due to the belief of sameness with the research individuals. However, during the observations I began to find informants were not completing sentences, thoughts or descriptions and gave the impression that this was due to their belief that I understood what they were referring to. Indeed, during such instances I was required to intervene and thereby elicit further information. This facilitated my understanding that, while insider knowledge may be considered similar to the informants, our overall experiences were not always the same.

Instead the informants' experiences were often quite unique and different from my own. As expected, there were occasions when I was able to draw upon similar experiences to the informants, while at the same time discovering a great deal about their practices and experiences, as well as my own.

The similarities and more importantly the differences found were in agreement with Hayano (1979) who reminds us that being familiar with a cultural group does not mean that you have an intimate understanding of all members of the group. Or generalizations could or should be made about the knowledge you hold about your own culture. Thus, in relation to the present research, it meant my insider knowledge may be a source of understanding or misunderstanding but may also serve as a means of building rapport while attempting to develop an appreciation of their social reality. Indeed, holding insider knowledge to some extent did not mean that one could not question what was being seen or heard. Additionally, holding membership to a group did not designate complete sameness within that group, rather it merely provided a guidepost for approaching the setting as an insider participant observer (Deutsch, 1981). Therefore, embracing insiderness did not mean that interpretation would be a 'true' portrait of British Muslims in higher education; rather it would be understood as a representation of possible perspectives.

Ethnographer's presence

Emerson et al (1995; 2) remind us that an ethnographer should seek a richer understanding of "others' worlds in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important". Thus, by immersing oneself in the field, the researcher is able to see from the inside how people lead their lives, their everyday routine, and what they find significant. By engaging in the field in this

way, the researcher is able to access the fluidity of others' lives which can therefore heighten understanding of the interaction process. Furthermore, it is advised that the researcher cannot and should not endeavour to be a 'fly on the wall' (Emerson et al., 2000).

However, it should also be understood that the ethnographer's presence in a setting will inevitably influence the behaviour and talk of those being studied, particularly as the researcher is required to interact with the informants, this is referred to as 'consequential presence' (Emerson et al., 2000). However, it is argued that 'reactive effects' should not be considered as 'contaminating' what is observed and learned, as they are the very source of what is observed and learned. Moreover, the relationship between the researcher and informants in the field should not be considered as disrupting or alter ongoing pattern of social interaction but instead it is argued that they reveal the foundation on which people practise social ties in the first place (Emerson et al., 2000). Therefore, direct relations with those being studied may provide a detailed understanding of the more refined unspoken principal assumptions that are often not readily available through observation or interview methods alone. Moreover, rather than seeing reactivity as a shortcoming that requires careful control or needs to be eliminated entirely, I needed to become sensitive to and perceive how I was seen and being treated by others.

Adler, Adler and Rochford (1986) also suggested that in order to reduce reactive behaviour the ethnographer must get involved and participate in the everyday life of those being observed. On one occasion, I found myself doing just that, where I became involved in an informant's campaign to becoming a member of the Students' Union Council. I was asked to help during the campaign by simply

handing out campaign flyers to passing students or guiding them to the point where they could cast their vote. I began performing the activity central to a particular informant who was taking part in the student elections as according to Emerson et al. (2000) continuous participation in the lives of others inspires appreciation of social life as created by fragmented and fluid process. It could be argued that as the researcher, my closeness to others daily life and activities heightened sensitivity to the social life of the students under study as a process.

Analysing the setting

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, ethnographic field research was chosen as one of the methods of data collection for this study in order gain an understanding of British Muslim students as they go about their everyday lives in certain social spaces at university. Malinowski (1922 cited by O'Reilly, 2005) insists that ethnography should not begin with a specific hypothesis to be tested, but rather one should enter the field with some understanding or areas of interest which can then be continuously fashioned through immersion in the setting. This is often described as the inductive approach, where the researcher enters the field with very few preconceptions. It also means being open about one's preconceptions and reading the relevant literature and theories relating chosen research topic and proceeding in a manner that is informed but also open to interpretation (O'Reilly, 2005). According to O'Reilly (2005) ethnographic observations involve the researcher moving back and forth between foreshadowing problems as well as theory grounded in data, and argue that the focus of research is not usually decided until near the end.

Applying this method allows data collection, analysis, and writing to be seen as phases that are intimately linked, rather than distinct stages. This is echoed by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) who argued that the analysis begins in the pre-fieldwork phase where research problems and questions are formulated and clarified and continues through to the process of writing the finalised articles and reports. O'Reilly (2012, p. 1) refers to this as an 'iterative-inductive' approach, and it involves a 'constant to and fro (iteration), of participating, observing, writing, reflecting, reading, thinking, talking, listening, participating, in a circular rather than a linear way'.

Drawing upon O'Reilly's (2005) approach I chose an unstructured method of observation as it has been argued by Mulhall (2002) that such an approach could capture the context and process of the lived experience. It was also suggested that as the researcher it was vital to enter 'the field' with as few predetermined notions as possible of what to expect and to find. However, as mentioned earlier, to assume that such a method was completely inductive would have been naïve and approaching it in such a way was impossible as I had already entered the research with some idea of what I was interested in and was strongly affiliated with the group I wanted to observe. Furthermore, I had an understanding of what I wanted to look at and as I gathered data and gained experience in the social setting I began to understand that my focus was likely to change. This gave me the opportunity to gain familiarity with aspects of the topic which I may not have considered.

Furthermore, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) identify analysis as both a formal and informal process; formally, it begins in the field where preliminary notes are written and developed, and informally, where it is suggested that the

analysis is 'embodied' in the ethnographer's ideas and perceptions. Fieldwork is demanding and the process data collection is equally time-consuming and as a result engaging in sustained data analysis in conjunction with data collection is often difficult in practice and therefore some level of 'reflexivity' can and should be maintained (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Reflexivity is encouraged as regularly reviewing field data allows it to develop and as a result data is not merely descriptive and a more analytical interpretation is gained.

Therefore, in order to successfully collect field data I needed to invest time, become part of the setting, learn the language to eventually enable 'the strange to become familiar and the familiar to become strange' (O'Reilly, 2005: 92). It is said that the emergent nature of ethnography can be unsettling to the novice researcher, so once 'in the field' I drew upon the strategies of Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) who suggest a 'funnel structure' to allow for the research to become progressively more focussed over the course of the fieldwork. Such a strategy was suggested as over time the research problem requires development and may need changing, and eventually its scope must be clarified and defined and finally its internal structure requires exploration (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Therefore using the 'funnel strategy' during the course of data collection allows the researcher to discover what the research is really about once data collection has moved on from the initial foreshadowing problems. The 'funnel strategy involves three stages:

1. Descriptive

This stage is largely descriptive and involves a general orientation in the field with the aim to give a rounded picture and open up all manners of theoretical possibilities. The descriptive fieldnotes are seen to be of value as they provide an insight into a culture being observed and provide the researcher with knowledge that challenge the predetermined stereotypes. For example, recording of data consisted of basic information related to what informants told me such as what they were studying, the year of their degree, family background, and their daily schedule, it also included a descriptive details of what was seen and heard, etc.

2. Focussed

Following on from the descriptive stage, the observations became progressively more focussed which involved a shift from a concern with describing social events to processing towards developing research questions using the initial descriptive data. For example, discussing the reasons why they pursued higher education, their family dynamics, and cultural norms that may have influenced their educational choices, etc. The aim of this stage was to identify if any interesting patterns were arising or could be identified, or whether anything stood out as surprising. It also aimed to look at whether what was being found related to previous accounts and if they were apparent inconsistencies and contradictions among the views of different individuals, within people's narratives, or between what they say and what they did.

3. Selective

The final aspect of the funnel strategy involved narrowing the focus further by following a process of 'abstraction' which involved the observations becoming more directed and focussed using the data already gathered. This meant fieldnotes were becoming more concise and specific as observations were more selective in order to provide evidence and answers to specific questions. This narrowed the focus and a process of abstraction to represent the phenomena. What I recorded was shaped by my general sense of what I perceived to be relevant to the foreshadowing research problems and readings, as well as insider knowledge. For example, parental encouragement and personal agency was drawn upon as a dominant theme when it came to pursuing education. In addition, the process of selectivity lead to the next phase of selecting participants for narrative interviewing to represent the diversity of key themes identified in the participant observations.

As my writing technique improved, I began structuring events and shaping what was seen and heard. As a result, the fieldnotes started to bring together methodological records of the research process. Indeed, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) recognise that it is not possible to capture every observation or dialogue heard in the field, and argue that fieldnotes are a selective representation of the researcher's observations. As such, we can never be 'objective' in our approach when it comes to theorising descriptive accounts, as it is up to the ethnographer to focus on certain activities, key events, and their reactions to them. For that reason, unconscious analysis of events is constantly occurring as fieldnotes are written.

Recording and organizing the observed setting

The aim of the observations was to get close to those in the field and to understand their social world. In order to cultivate that closeness, Emerson et al (2000) recommended that the ethnographer must describe situations, interactions, events and actions in as much detail. In order to strengthen this phase of the research, it is also necessary for ethnographer to write down notes methodically in the social setting while at the same time keeping up with and participating in the daily routine of those being observed, thus creating a collection of written records of what was experienced and observed.

In order to write detailed fieldnotes of my time in the social setting, I adopted the participating-in-order-to-write method of ethnography during the early stages of the data collection. At the time this felt like the most appropriate method to capture what was happening in the field, as I was primarily concerned with capturing dialogue and stories as accurately as possible. This method involved writing jottings during the observation to help fulfil that criterion. I was initially ambivalent about openly jotting notes as Emerson et al. (2000) warned that doing so could interfere with the interactions with others if the researcher is just observing and making notes. However, it was also stated that participating-in-order to write would allow me to maintain my researcher role and allow me to habitually step outside of the scenes and events and assess the quality of my notes.

In order to write jottings during the observations I made sure informants were aware of my research aims (see section on ethics earlier) and I would seek permission to write down brief notes. In doing so, I would place emphasis on the

importance of portraying the informant's everyday life as accurately as possible, which would involve getting down as thorough a representation as possible of what transpired and what was said during the observation. I found that in some cases, once I had explained my desire to write jottings, informants understood and accommodated to the need to take notes, as like me they indicated that they also wanted an honest and faithful representation of British Muslims. In order to remember significant events or stories, I would write down 'headnotes', jottings, abbreviations and phrases so to later construct more fulsome fieldnotes, which usually took place as soon as possible, after the observation.

Indeed, by choosing to carry out fieldwork in an overt manner meant I was able to select when, where and how to write jottings. However, it became apparent during some observations that although informants gave permission for notes to be taken, they showed signs of discomfort and nervousness. This was done by way of slowing down their speech and being reluctant to share an intimate story or stopping mid-sentence and waiting for me to finish writing before they continued. Upon noticing a change in informants' behaviour and attitude towards me when I held a notepad and pen, I began to question whether writing fieldnotes during the observations was an ideal approach. Particularly, during situations that provoked a feeling of uneasiness and resulted in informants not wanting to share intimate lived experiences or when I saw it was disrupting the flow of the conversation.

Therefore, due to such incidents and the desire for a more naturalistic experience when engaging with informants I decided that it would be best to wait until after the conversation had occurred before retreating to a private location to write down jottings, key incidents and words that I wanted to include

in the full fieldnotes. Indeed, Emerson et al. (2000) caution that taking notes as events occur is considered a strange activity in certain social settings. Therefore, choosing to write during the observational discussions meant potentially highlighting my role as an observer rather than a participant, which may have resulted in informants becoming reluctant to share their personal, intimate stories with me, regardless of whether they considered me an insider.

Throughout the observations, I was concerned with the quality of data being produced, as well as my rapport with those who I wanted to observe, seek to know and understand. For that reason, I struggled to balance my research commitments and my desire to authentically interact with those people whose world I had entered. When it came to the quality of the data collection I wanted to capture as much detail as possible and attempt to reproduce verbatim conversations, as they could easily be lost to memory and the aim was to try and capture dialogue and 'naturally occurring speech' as accurately as possible (Emerson et al., 1995). However, I began to find that writing and describing observation is not a straightforward process. According to Emerson et al. (1995. p. 7) a 'transcript is never verbatim rendering of discourse' because it is the product of the researcher's ongoing analytical interpretation of what is seen and heard. Indeed, this is even more of an issue with participant observation than with a recording of a conversation.

Literature suggests that there are concerns about using field data as the researcher may become too cautious about producing fieldnotes that accurately represent the field experience (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Indeed, due to the fear that the precise field experience will be lost, tape recorders are often favoured to produce verbatim evidence of the setting, which can then be

analysed by the researcher. However, this would not have been appropriate for the current research as recordings only capture a small section of an interaction and do not preserve everything that happens during an observation. Accordingly, DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) argue that field notes are a product constructed by the researcher and it is researcher who makes the decision as to what is written and what is omitted. Indeed, the level of detail to include after each interaction was ultimately my decision depending upon what aspect of the conversation I deemed relevant to record.

However, Emerson et al. (2000) argue that to claim that there is only one reality out there to be observed would mean that there is one 'best' description of any particular event. In other words, writing fieldnotes does not mean copying down 'facts' about 'what happened'; rather they are a transcript of the researcher's ongoing interpretive and analytical decisions about action and speech within the field. Therefore, there is no correct way to write what was observed; as there will be different descriptions of 'the same' event and so fieldnotes should not be claimed as being objective (Emerson et al., 1995). Similarly Coffey (1999) proposed that when we are writing fieldnotes, we are not simply describing the social world we are participating in, rather we are involved in the construction of a particular representation of a social reality that we are a member of at a particular time. Furthermore, it is stated that a researcher does not just produce a document of what occurred in the field but instead the fieldnotes should be identified as a recording of the researcher's personal progress in the field and therefore all written notes could be perceived as diaries of the journey (Coffey, 1999).

Indeed, once an observation had taken place, I would exit the field with an aim to record the fieldnotes as soon as possible, as recommended by Hammersley and Atkinson, (2007). I would begin by writing brief notes, reflections and broad patterns immediately after the observation and would then return to my office to write comprehensive field notes as it has been proposed by Mulhall (2003) that short or long-term reflection of observations may deliver a different view on the events. In addition, it is encouraged that the ethnographer practices 'thick description' to record anything that is of importance (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Thick description consists of attempting to describe events in vivid, dense and detailed manner (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). Such an approach allows for a clear description of the process of interaction and the ways in which members of social settings create and sustain specific social realities (Emerson et al., 1995).

'Validity', interpreting the field notes and actively creating realities

Producing fieldnote data has drawn criticism and findings of ethnographic research are often regarded as unrealistic and lacking validity and generalizability (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). This could be recognised as potentially threatening the findings of the current research and indeed, strategies have been developed to address the issues, such as respondent validation or triangulation. Respondent validation aims to establish a 'correspondence' between the researcher's and the participants' social world by exploring the events to which the participants recognise and agree to the researcher's findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Denzin (1978) introduced the idea of triangulation into the discussion of qualitative research as 'the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon' (p. 291). By this definition

Denzin (1978) conceives triangulation as a strategy of validation. He distinguishes different types of triangulation which broadly involves the comparison of data relating to the same phenomena, but takes advantage of using more than one data set to produce a more accurate or 'valid' representation of the field.

However, Bryman (1988) criticised triangulation by arguing that the idea of combining methods leads to greater validity of the findings is naïve and at times subscribes to realism and therefore implying that there can only be one single definitive reality of the social world. Indeed, triangulation is not considered compatible with the present research's epistemological underpinning of social constructionism, in that there is no one 'true' version of reality, rather the research findings will be one among many possible realities of informants' social life. It should also be stated that the aim and task of the current research is not to 'exhaust the singular meaning of an event, but to reveal the multiplicity of meaning' (Mishler, 1979, p.10). Indeed, it was through my encounters with informants in the field for these meanings to emerge. As the researcher, I was engaging in the lives and concerns of informants being studied, and so my perspective was interwoven with phenomena that cannot be characterised as being objective and independent of my perspective and method (Mishler, 1979, p. 10). In other words, it would have been impossible for me as the ethnographer to take in everything, rather all conversations were a product of co-construction with individuals in the field. In addition, particular perspectives were developed by way of engaging in some activities rather than others while also selecting the varying priorities and points of view. Indeed, drawing upon social constructionism meant that the aim of the research was not to determine

'the truth' but to reveal the multiple truths apparent in others' lives, as well as my own (see Chapter 2).

Denzin (1996) further criticises ethnographic research for the assumption that the methods enable probing which may reveal lived experience while also assuming that the participant's world is final and that talk directly reflects subjective or lived experience. Therefore, implying verbatim talk matches lived experience and its representation. He goes on to challenge these assumptions and argues that language and speech do not mirror experience, rather they create it and in the process continually transform and give way to that which is being described. Denzin (1996) therefore argues that the meanings of participants' accounts are always in motion and there can never be the final or accurate representation of what was said or meant; instead the statements are 'only different textual representations of different experiences' (p.132). Similarly, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue that 'pure description' in ethnographic methods does not exist and therefore data cannot be accepted at face value. Indeed, this leads to complications when trying to address 'response validity'. In this situation, informants could have been requested to validate the research analysis, however this would mean being reliant upon meanings that are reconstructed on the basis of memory. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) state that informants are never fully aware of their actions and feelings whilst being observed which means that the likelihood of them remembering the encounter is almost zero. Therefore, close consideration must be given to possible threats to validity as analysis is open to further critique. Therefore, it was decided that the notion of information validity should not be considered.

According to Denzin (1996) any attempt to validate data still holds to the notion that 'truth' is waiting to be discovered and that social world can be truthfully and accurately captured by the researcher through fieldnotes and engagement in the field. Although I was able to develop and improve my writing and recording of fieldnotes, it should be recognised that what was recorded was, therefore, not a 'true' depiction of what was being observed and then later written. Rather, all fieldnotes are an interpretation of time spent in the field and that through writing and recording field observations the researcher must recognise that the data collected is not simply reporting and recording an independent order of reality but rather they are actively engaging in the construction of that particular version reality (Emerson et al., 2000).

Developing an analytical approach

I remained in the field for approximately four months; I started collecting data towards the end of one academic year and the beginning of another. I would often dedicate 2-3 days in the field, although on occasions I was only there for an afternoon. However, it was time to draw back from the field, return the fieldnotes and produce a coherent, focussed analysis of the observed social life and identities of the students at the University of Bradford. It was also time to move on to phase two, and explore pertinent issues identified as being important in more detail. As noted earlier, the initial fieldnote analysis was based upon Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) 'funnel approach' to the data collection and analysis. However, due to the volume of field notes and personal reflections collated, Emerson et al's (2000) guidelines were also drawn upon, to process and code fieldnote data. This provided a stage by stage account of how

to begin to make sense of the 'data corpus'. These guidelines suggest that there are seven stages of organising and analysing the field data:

- Stage one: re-reading through all fieldnotes as a complete corpus.
- Stage two: analytically coding fieldnotes.
- Stage three: open coding.
- Stage four: writing initial memos.
- Stage five: selecting themes.
- Stage six: focused coding.
- Stage seven: integrative memos.

Emerson et al., (2000) suggested that the fieldnotes analysis should initially begin with re-reading the fieldnotes, open coding and writing initial memos. Therefore, to begin with the fieldnotes were read line-by-line in the order they were written. This provided fresh insights into the understanding and interpretation of the people and events by reviewing them as complete set of notes. It also allowed for a much broader understanding of everything that was observed and recorded. Thus, encouraging the recognition of patterns and making comparisons and find themes that related to one another, and important differences between incidents which may have initially been considered similar. Additionally, questions were asked whilst reading the fieldnotes, for example, what assumptions are being made about what was observed? What was witnessed in the field, what was learnt and most importantly, and why were certain events, conversations, observations included in the fieldnotes? According to Emerson et al., (2000) such questions enable the researcher to become aware of the complexities involved in pursuing meaning of what was

said in the field by informants. This then led to open coding. Emerson et al. (2000) instructed that coding at this stage should be free from any pre-established notions in relation to the fieldnotes. The aim of this stage was to generate as many codes as possible, regardless as to whether they fit with the research's initial focus. Indeed, the aim of this stage is to open avenues of inquiry, and therefore the focus may change as the researcher shifts through the fieldnotes.

The early stage of the analytical process was not rigid; rather it was a fluid process. This meant time was spent reading through, which led to coding and finally written memos, which would mean direct or redirect attention to issues and possibilities that require further reading of the same or additional notes. Thus the early stages of analysis were not confined to one procedure at a time nor were they undertaken in a particular order rather this aspect of the analysis was undertaken in one sitting. Indeed, once the data were read though several times, and coding and initial memos were written, core themes were selected and data was broken down into more manageable chunks. It was also rearranged into the selected themes for further analysis.

Following on from here, techniques were used in order to carry out more specific analyses: this included focus coding and writing integrative memos. Once core themes were selected, a further line-by-line analysis of the fieldnotes was carried out. At this point, data was reviewed to either fit into the core themes, or made into sub-themes that related to one another in some way. This stage of the analytical process was the beginning of the development of an argument or story that had the potential of being developed further. Finally, integrative memos involved presenting and linking the codes together by

providing integrative memos in the write up that aim to integrate theoretical connections between the fieldnote excerpts.

Summary

The aim of this chapter was to provide a detailed outline of the research design and the methods employed for the data collection in phase one of the study. Ethnographic observations were chosen in order to capture the use of the various social settings by informants and to understand actions, practices and meanings people gave to issues relevant to the research. The participation observational phase also enabled a movement from a 'factual' and more descriptive beginning where fieldnotes were concerned with understanding the role of education beyond the boundaries of the direct educational sphere to the 'thickening of the story' (Denzin, 1989). This meant moving towards understanding the ways in which cultural discourses surrounding the educational experiences are negotiated and constructed in relation to identity, as introduced in the theoretical chapter (see Chapter 2). Phase one of the research design meant spending a substantial amount of time 'in the field' and was viewed as valuable in gaining trust, respect and access to information and informants. Moreover, it was used to identify diversity of experience and therefore select participants for phase two, the more focused aspect of the study which involved narrative interviews (see Chapters 6 and 7).

Chapter 4: Analysing the field data – presenting the observations and experiences of Muslims within the field.

This chapter is concerned with presenting an analysis of the fieldnotes collected in order to understand the experiences of British Muslims in higher education. Although much has been written about Muslims, there is limited literature on the lived experiences of British Muslims within the university space. The ethnographic phase aimed to identify the ways in which young Muslims participate in everyday university life and how they presented themselves within the university space. It also aims to understand their motivation, identities and experiences. The analysis will draw upon what was observed as well as what informants told me in order to support a heterogeneity understanding of British Muslims experiences within the higher education context.

The chapter begins with a discussion in relation to the different ways young Muslims in the present research navigate and explore identities and social relationships within the university setting. The analysis will then move onto to discuss the reasons why young British Muslims chose to pursue higher education. As the research progressed, more focussed observations developed and the different ways the young Muslims in this study positioned themselves in relation to others was revealed. Therefore upon this understanding, consideration is given to the ways in which these Muslim students negotiated gender roles and cultural expectations. Finally, the chapter concludes by reflecting on the meaning of the hijab as it was a popular choice for the Muslim women around campus and explores the context, importance and consequences of wearing it.

University as a means to navigate and explore identities and social relationships

Maintaining family honour

The early observations were concerned with observing what was happening in the field and why. It was revealed during the observations that some informants constructed university as a means to break away from their 'conservative' families. There was evidence to suggest that certain young Muslim students were using higher education as a way to gain independence and saw it as an opportunity to escape cultural boundaries and parental expectations. However, a common account proposed by informants was that they were experiencing unwanted parental involvement, and due to restrictions, were not able to fully embrace and experience the social life that they felt came with attending university. Female informants in particular spoke to me about how they had to negotiate time outside the university campus and their course schedule to socialise and experience university in ways that they had initially anticipated and/or desired. It could be argued that some of the informants felt caught between wanting to break away from the constrictions of living at home and a moral burden to not let their family down. The following excerpt is an example of my interaction with a group of individuals who spoke to me about how they spent their time at university:

Field notes: Mariam, Umera and Haroon, all 18, all studying Biomedical Science.

I observed a group of four informants today at around 3.30pm. Two guys and two girls, one of the guys didn't really speak at all, though like the rest,

he gave me permission to observe. They were sat around one of the big tables in the Atrium and discussing the late afternoon practical that they had to attend as part of their lab work. I mentioned that I was going to an event a friend had organised and had invited me along at Student Central, which took place in the evening. I had a leaflet promoting the event with me so I passed it round, just in case someone else was interested. Although Mariam and Umera showed interest, they said they couldn't make it but Haroon wanted to attend so and asked the rest of them to join him. Mariam said, 'no, I can't...need to be home for 6ish.' She sounded a little irritated.. She continued by saying, 'It's annoying because my parents always worry and want me back at a certain time. If I come late, my brother is on the phone asking me where I am.' Umera shared a similar problem, 'I hoped I'd be more independent here but because you can't that much when you still live at home, uni was an escape...but it's harder to stay back...even to study...like if I had a deadline and wanted to stay at uni, I wouldn't be allowed. We have lab work all the time and that is annoying because I have to ask permission and get my dad to approve'. They started to discuss the differences in how they were treated by their parents due to their gender. Haroon stated that he didn't experience the same and was allowed to come and go as he pleased. He added, 'I don't take the piss because mum worries but they've never told me to get back early or asked why I'd come home late. So I can do what I want when I'm at uni.' I asked if he had a sister and whether she had the same freedoms as him. He looked at me confused and said 'obviously not, she's a girl' I had already assumed so but I had to ask to confirm for research purposes.

I knew of the limits spoken by the young women, I have them to some degree.

I had a chance to walk around the uni after this observation because I just wanted to see who was about after about 6pm. I saw a few female students getting picked up by men outside Richmond, who I assumed were their fathers or brothers, though it was not something I confirmed. As the university spaces slowly quietening down, I headed down to the Student Central for the event and to see my friend. Again, it wasn't as busy and there were different groups of people there but I saw more Muslim men than I did Muslim women. Of course, people can socialise outside university, so it probably didn't mean anything but it just seemed relevant to what I had observed informants say earlier this afternoon.

The young women in the excerpt above indicate that they were subject to a far greater degree of regulation in their daily domestic and social lives than their male counterparts. In comparison, Haroon constructed university as an environment that enabled experimentation, exploration and independence without restrictions. The constraints described by the women in the excerpt above could be due to the given discourses of *izzat* (religious/family honour). Literature has examined the concept of *izzat* as women effectively carrying the burden of upholding the family honour (see Afshar, 1989; Brah, 1993; Bhopal, 1999; Ahmad, 2001; Werbner 2007; Ijaz and Abbas 2010) and according to Bhopal (1999, p. 121) *'if a daughter steps out of line, she not only jeopardizes her own respect in the community but her parent's social standing'*. In relation to the excerpt above, the female informants storied their parents as ensuring that they maintain the ideals of *izzat* by restricting the hours they spent at university

thus potentially hindered the prospect of fully exploring the social life outside the confines of academic lectures and seminars. Indeed, the excerpt above indicates the ways in which young women's Muslim identity intersects and interacts with their everyday university life, in that they are having to negotiate a position for themselves in relation to cultural expectations which is said to inhibit their chances of a holistic university experience. However, as the observations progressed, it was found that young Muslim women are indeed challenging the ways they are being positioned, though they remained bound by cultural expectations and constraints. This will be discussed in more detail as we move through the chapter.

Developing and maintaining a religious identity

As the observations progressed, it became apparent that informants' peer group generally always included Muslims:

Field notes: Student Central

I mentioned this really earlier in my field notes but it is becoming more and more noticeable that there is a clear divide between Muslims and people of other faiths...in terms of how they socialise at university. A few students told me that there is a divide in and out lectures. I was told that Muslim students congregate together and usually interact with those of other faiths and ethnicities when it comes to uni work. However, as an observer, I wouldn't say this is a Muslim led issue as I have seen a similar pattern with people of other ethnicities and backgrounds. People seem to be drawing to what they perceive as familiar.

The following excerpt provides further understanding for this social trend:

Field notes: The Atrium

I approached a group of guys earlier today. I explained the purpose of the research and they gave their consent but they weren't really interested in sharing anything. One of the male informants started talking about heading down to Lahore, a local café type place close to the university, after the observation. I told them I spent many hours there during my undergraduate years, trying really hard to get a conversation flowing: 'It has a great selection of food and you get your money's worth.' They all agreed and one said, 'yeah, same!' and then mentioned a local shisha bar that they also visit regularly, just off Leeds Road or close by. I forgot the name. He said everyone goes there as well now. (I did a quick search just now and think it's called 'Pasha'...it's the only one that came up). Again, shisha was common among Muslim students when I was an undergrad. He said something about it being the equivalent to their 'nightlife' which I found interesting. I assumed these guys didn't drink alcohol, being Muslim and it being prohibited in Islam. I didn't ask either. I came away thinking and kind of understanding why you often see groups of Muslims hanging out together. They socialised differently and entertained themselves differently. They looked for more 'halal' friendly environments and maybe felt didn't need to explain themselves and required less thought. Have fun within the limits set by the religion.

Indeed, Kara (2012) found that Muslim students fashioned alcohol consumption as being central to fellow students' social life which meant they were unable to participate in events at the student union or places outside the university. Therefore in response they created their own social environments through

friendship circles, prayer room, and Islamic societies. Indeed, Kara's findings were particularly relevant to what I had observed and although I was never at the university long enough to see what happens late into the evening, by simply looking around the Student Central there were poster and leaflets inviting students to events that served alcohol. However, as it is prohibited to consume alcohol in Islam, it appeared to result in Muslims forming their own social circles with fellow Muslims. It should be noted that the observations also highlighted that Muslims were not the only group to socialise in isolation, in that interactions and trends that occurred in students' social world indicated that it was common to see people from other ethnic backgrounds grouping together. This social trend may have been due to the comfort of being surrounded by that which is most familiar and relatable. Indeed, positions chosen by students are emergent, dynamic and subject to context of interaction and the excerpts above indicate that Muslim informants negotiated their position within the university space through the construction of their Muslim identity within popular western culture. The following excerpt provides a further understanding as to why this may have occurred:

Field notes: Student Central

It's the new academic year and about a week to go before lectures begin again. I made my way down to the SC because I had seen leaflets going round about the Freshers' Fayre. I got there during the midday rush because I knew it'd be busy so it would be great just to observe behaviour, people and just the setting. There were a lot of stalls located around the Student Central and each stall represented a particular society. I don't remember there being so many! They were all trying to attract new

students to join, most were using free stuff as a way to entice new students and I think it was working. Students love free stuff. It was a really fun atmosphere, a bit of music, free food and free stationery. It costs around £3-£5 to join. I didn't speak to many people, I was mainly there to look around, see if I could record anything in particular and I did end up noticing some things. Like for example, how students were grouping together, it seemed as though people were drawn to those that were similar to them. I saw that a lot people's social circle consisted of individuals from the same ethnic group, or religious group. I mentioned this in one of the first observations, so nothing new to report. Although it wasn't completely obvious which religious group certain people belonged to. But when I saw a bunch of women who wore the hijab, I made the obvious assumption that they were Muslim. Or individuals who looked Pakistani or Arab, again I noted them as Muslim. But it wasn't just Muslims, I saw students from East Asia whose social group consisted of others from that region. Or Black students, whose social group mainly consisted of other Black students. I took a look at the list of the societies and I noticed that a lot of the societies cater for particular/specific groups of people. The different religious societies and international societies highlight that, e.g. Islamic Society (ISOC), Christian Union, Sikh Society or African and Caribbean Society (ACS), Chinese Society. From my understanding, a society usually comes about because of the demand or a person or group of individuals want a space for people of same/similar background/interest. This was really interesting because we talk about people grouping together but uni societies are catering for this.

Indeed, for certain Muslim informants, the Islamic Society (ISOC) was constructed to be a significant facet of their university experience. For example, in the following excerpt, Omar and his friends spoke about ISOC as a means to reconnect with their faith as well as bond with Muslims from other backgrounds:

Field notes: Omar, Saf, Halima, Qurrat and Aftab, all 19

I attended an ISOC event and got talking to Halima. It was held in a large lecture theatre. ISOC events are always known to be popular and this was no different. I told Halima about my research and she seemed really interested. I should note that I wasn't there to observe because I wasn't given permission to do so. She offered to help out by inviting a few of her friends. I didn't catch the degrees they were studying because after getting their consent, it slipped my mind completely. A lot was being said in the group and I found it a little difficult to keep up. There was a lot of excitement amongst the group around the event and there was some discussion on what they could do to make the next one as successful. One of the group members took out this notebook to make some notes about potential ideas. The group also mentioned something about a new prayer room.

Omar told me he attends a lot of ISOC events and was able to make more Muslim friends by joining ISOC and how they really influenced him when it came to practicing Islam...he said, 'being around people who encourage you to remain steady in religion, to become a better person and be part of a group that gets you. Do you know what I mean? No one questions what you're doing or not doing. You just do it, you stop a conversation to pray or

organise a get together around Jummah [Friday prayer]. Nobody asks why, that helps to avoid awkward conversations.' I noticed the rest of the group nodding their heads in agreement.

Qurrat added to what Omar said about it being a positive influence, she told me she had already decided she wanted to join before starting uni, 'everyone had so many good things to say about it and Islam is important and you want to continue to learn as you study for your degree.' Halima added, 'to keep that religious connection while dealing with uni stresses. I think we help each other out. It's good to have these kinds of contacts.'

I could tell friendship was important to the group...they spoke about how they were all getting on with their degree but were also using uni and especially the friends they made to makes sure they weren't heading in the wrong direction.

This excerpt suggests that this group of informants attributed a strong affiliation to Islam and that their friendship fulfilled a close, family-like role in supporting their Muslim identity. Moreover, the group constructed the Islamic Society (ISOC) as facilitating the feeling of closeness and connection with Islam during their time at university. Indeed, ISOCs presence within the university setting is said to cater for the needs of Muslim students and endorses Muslim students' 'public ethnicity' (Modood, 1996). However, Song's (2012) research highlights that while joining ISOC at university maybe a popular choice among Muslim students, very little is known about the ways in which they participate in them. For informants in the above excerpt, ISOC encapsulated a significant aspect of their Muslim identity and allowed them to feel part of an extended

chain of people who know one another. Moreover, it provided an ideal setting for the development of their Muslim identity as it enabled them to uphold the values and practices they maintained prior to arriving at university. Qurrat's account in particular suggested she aimed to seek out and access familiar religious spaces in order to foster continuity. Similarly, Halima sought to maintain a conscious balance between her academic and spiritual goals, with a desire to affirm a religious identity, where she is able to get fully involved and navigate between her religious duties and her academic responsibilities. Similarly, research by Fincher (2011) found that students turned to the church as they considered it an opportunity to continue with their already established religious self in a new environment. For the Christian students' in the study, church provided a social setting where they could obtain resources and practical help to cope as a newcomer. The present research constituted similar findings in that these particular informants adhered to a religious way of life and sought to maintain it while at university by attending events organised by ISOC in order to have a religiously fulfilling university experience. Indeed, research by Song (2012) indicated that Muslim students' participation in ISOCs was largely due to the desire to network with other Muslims on campus. According to Hopkins (2011) Muslim students developed new and close relationships based on mutual understanding of religion. Indeed, the observations highlight that young Muslims in the field were more likely to socialise with members of the same religious group and this was not simply due to the differences in the way young Muslims socialise in comparison to their non-Muslim peers. The observations also revealed that ISOC provided social context and narrative space in which Muslim students were able to negotiate a strong religious

identity. Indeed, positioning theory offers a conceptual framework for understanding this fundamental identity process and it could be argued that through encounters at university, young Muslims were positioning themselves in relation to others and through negotiations were actively taking up a strong religious identity.

British Muslims pursuit of higher education

It became apparent during the early stages of the participant observations that the informants in this study attended university for a diverse number of reasons. The students I spoke with placed emphasis on various aspect of their life and attributed their transition to higher education to a number of key motivational factors which included parental expectations, upward social mobility and career aspirations. The importance of education was also highlighted and many were mindful of the various opportunities a higher education could offer. The next section considers the reasons why certain informants chose to pursue higher education.

During the observations, many informants identified their parents as their primary motivators when it came to their schooling and academic attainment. Indeed, it was revealed that certain informants pursued higher education because the value of it was passed down to them from early childhood through to young adulthood from their parents. Informants were probed with regards to why they felt their parents encouraged academic aspirations. The following excerpt is an empirical example of an informant constructing a story which demonstrates that her parents were at the forefront when it came to transmitting the value of higher education as a route towards upward social mobility:

Field notes: Aliyah, 21, Social Work

I spoke to a student named Aliyah today. She was sitting alone in the Union Mall. It was a little busy, with a lot of students coming in and out of the building. I was still getting used to this whole walking up to strangers and asking questions thing. I did the usual, introduced myself and got her consent to observe and talk about the research. She told me she was studying to become a social worker. I told her about how my ambitions to be a Social Worker never happened but I know a few people who are in that line of work. I always find discussing everyday things was a great way to start, eases a person into the conversation and just makes it easier to chat about things people might think are boring but are actually really useful to me and the research. She spoke about how she was finding uni and her course and I explained my journey to a PhD. I mentioned not putting much thought into coming to uni when I first applied for the undergrad, but only really worked hard when I got here. She agreed to this and said: '...my dad spent a lot of time making sure I was studying.' I immediately related to this and spoke about my dad being from the same generation and having similar ambitions for his kids. She continued and said: 'he talks about the mills shutting and getting no work afterwards. He'd always say that a good education and a degree will always get you good job.' We spent a few more moments discussing our families and our upbringing. But this wasn't the first time I heard this, quite a few students spoke about their parents pushing them and wanting them to study. It is understandable why they pushed...they're from a generation that had to give up the

chance of going to school to work. It's always about earning money, a better way of life...work hard now to reap reward in the future. But it struck me because although it wasn't strange hearing this, I still think it takes a lot of effort to just do something because someone else wants you too. I can say my dad wanted me to get a degree but I wouldn't give him all the credit. I put effort in as well, I had my own set of dreams.

Bhopal and Preston's (2011) research suggests that occasionally parents in effect emplotted educational ambition for their children by drawing upon the difficulties and experiences of immigration. Similarly, Aliyah constructs a narrative that infers her father drew upon his life course and his experience of redundancy and being out of work after the closure of the mills in the 1980s as a way to inspire his daughter to pursue higher education. It could be argued that Aliyah's father constructed university as assuring opportunities within the job market. Suleman's narrative draws on a similar discourse, in that his story begins with him discussing his educational attainment through parental expectations but in a communicative reflexive fashion, he stories his decision as an independent choice he made:

Field notes: Suleman, 20, Optometry

I got to Student Central so late today...almost decided to go back to my office because students had left after having their lunch. Although, lunchtime really isn't the best time to observe, students have better things to do during the hour they have free. I approached a male student sat in one of the booths in the SC, explained my research and he seemed interested. I got consent and sat down. He told me he was

studying Optometry and had exams in a few weeks. He looked a little stressed. I asked him how his revision was going and he seemed satisfied with his progress. I said something about A-Levels being so much harder and he said, 'Yes, there was so much pressure to do well.' I agreed and related said something about teachers piling on the pressure and he added '...and parents.' Again, with the parents! I asked him to explain and he told me about how his dad wanted him to have a more stable life. We started to discuss our parents and how they were similar in the ways they encouraged us and the stories they shared about how hard it was for them when they first came to England.

But I thought about how I didn't just want to please my parents. I wanted to do well and I wondered if Suleman was the same. So I asked...I guessed he was clever since he was studying Optom and exams require some drive. He told me about his family's lifestyle when he was younger...'Like when I was younger, we weren't allowed to buy certain things, we lived in a rough area, we got free-school meals, and my uniform wasn't brand new every year.' For Suleman, a degree meant a better job, which meant improving living standards and not worrying about income. Basically, what his dad wanted for him but he was focused because he wanted a better life. He had personal ambition to succeed.

Like Aliyah, Suleman also storied his father as drawing on the narrative of the benefit of education as a means to achieve economic success. Indeed, by outlining on the struggles of immigration, Suleman's father's motives intersect among race and socio-economic status and encouraging high aspirations could

be constructed as him seeking to protect his son from similar experiences. Aliyah and Suleman's accounts, as well as my own, are akin to Modood's (2004) findings which suggest that parental aspiration is rooted in their own labour market experiences and education is constructed as a means of achieving social and spatial mobility.

However, Suleman provided a further dimension to his pursuit of higher education by constructing a story from his childhood. This indicates that agency and motivation was also operative when it came to pursuing higher education, therefore suggesting that Suleman was working across two intersecting life-courses, his parents and his own, signifying that he was not merely channelling parental ambition and expectations. Suleman's narrative suggests a desire to distance himself from his early childhood. Informants would often interchange childhood stories and challenge imposed positionings with more recent self-understanding to help contextualise the construction of selfhood. Indeed, the notion of habitus is often considered a fundamental reason to pursue education (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984; Shah et al., 2010; Zhou, 2005; Modood, 2004). However, 'habitus' does not consider individuals conscious deliberation when determining practices, and therefore denies individuals in higher education reflexive capabilities (Bohman, 1999). Crossley (2001) argues that Bourdieu miscalculates the ways in which 'reflexivity' routinely enters everyday life and that individuals have to make choices about their future, in terms of career aspirations, economic status, and leisure activities. Archer's (2003) account of human action can also be drawn upon to help understand conscious reflexive deliberation, something which is argued to be central when it comes to individual's behaviour, values and aspirations.

Suleman's reflexive engagement with higher education suggests a link between individualism, social structures and a multitude of other social actors. His story also indicates the fluidity of habitus, as it can be transformed by subsequent experiences and influences by other aspects of family settings. Thus it could be argued that individuals are not merely agents who transport and reproduce habitual practices, but rather lived experiences and individual agency also play a significant role in educational choices and the forming of a unique, distinct 'self'.

Similarly, Fatima's narrative places emphasis her mother's life trajectory and her own life course as a way to construct the choices that led her to pursue higher education:

Field notes: Fatima, 21, Pharmacy

Fatima called me as I was walking through the Atrium. I had met Fatima before in Student Central...I didn't expect or want to talk about the research but when I sat down with her but she wanted to know more. We got talking and I asked why she decided to come to uni. She spoke to me about her mum being a single mother, and how she brought her and her younger brother up alone and how it's inspired her. I didn't ask about their financial situation but from what was being said, I could tell her family struggled financially, particularly when she was younger because she said they went through 'hard times'. She said, 'my mum didn't have it easy...hopefully with me getting a degree, she won't need to work as hard.' Fatima didn't really talk about getting a degree to help her own needs...which is something I heard a lot...it was more about

helping her family. It was interesting because, I'd never heard anyone use their qualification for other people. I'm sure other people may have wanted to do the same but it wasn't something any of the other informants had said to me.

Fatima's depiction of her early childhood draws upon the struggles her mother faced whilst raising her and her younger brother as a single parent within a working-class household. Fatima's narrative infers that her pursuit of higher education involved wanting to support her mother and reduce her burden of having to provide for a home singlehandedly. Fatima's account suggests that her mother's life trajectory inspired her to push towards economic success. Indeed, this demonstrates a relational aspect to her account when it came to educational aspirations and choices. Moreover, Fatima's account challenges the assumption that educational identities are the channelling of parental aspirations and expectations of their children. Rather subjective experiences and the complexities of an individual's subjective world also need to be considered when it comes to understanding why individuals enter higher education. Indeed, the reproductive character of habitus retains deterministic qualities as it constructs habitus as being the fundamental influence to determine social action (Alexander, 1995). The excerpt above indicates intersections of class and gender, Fatima's willingness to transform and move towards upward social mobility can be constructed as her reviewing and adding discrepancies to the depiction of working-class families, especially working class mothers.

Indeed, literature has often drawn on sociological notions of social and ethnic capital to explain the increase in certain ethnic minority groups' participation in

higher education (e.g. Bagguley and Hussain, 2007; Bagguley and Hussain, 2014; Modood, 2014; Mellor, 2011; Shah et al., 2010). However, while some accounts demonstrated that parents were in some way responsible in socialising their children as to the importance of education and encouraging participation, others revealed that in doing so the complex processes of interaction between individuals and wider social markers are ignored.

Gender roles and cultural expectations

The previous section drew on accounts of key informants to help understand the reasons why some informants chose to pursue higher education. As the ethnographic observations progressed, the purpose of an education was further discussed. It became evident during the discussions that both genders constructed a 'position' for themselves in a particular way in society. For this aspect of the observations, I drew upon an intersectional approach and positioning theory (Davies and Harré, 1990) as a way to enable my observations to become more focused. This allowed an understanding into how British Muslims discursively positioned the self and others within their narrative and how social distinctions other than gender (e.g. race/ethnicity, class, age etc) shaped and constructed informants' masculinities and femininities.

Exploring the performance of masculinity

During the ethnographic observations it became apparent that some of the male informants in the research strongly identified with the provider role and being recognised as a breadwinner was important to them. The excerpts below provide evidence of the ways certain informants positioned themselves:

Field notes: Amir, male, 20 years old, Business and Law and Imran, 19, Business and Management Studies

I got to the Atrium around 3ish. I saw a guy sitting alone next to the window although his friend joined him a little later and also took part in the research. I went up to him and introduced myself, the research and requested consent to begin the process of data collection. Amir seemed surprised I was doing a PhD. Which is nothing new...wasn't exactly the first time person to ask me about the PhD. I have family members, male and female, who say stuff like, 'What's the point of it? It isn't like you'll do anything with it once you're married', basically I'm wasting my time. I just assumed that's what Amir meant when he asked so I asked him if he felt the same, but he said no. But then he asked about my plans, life after uni...questions a lot of students have asked. I don't make a deal of it because if it helps build rapport and trust, I'm all for it. I told him about my 'plans' after my degree and he asked if I was a 'career driven woman'. I could tell he didn't agree so I asked 'Say in the future, you decided to get married and your wife-to-be was career driven, and wanted to get that promotion and was dedicated to her job, would you approve?' He told he'd prefer it if she didn't work because 'men and women have different responsibilities...it is my responsibility to provide for and look after my family, and a woman's to take care of the children and stuff around the house.' I sensed pride and the feeling obligation to fulfil a role he felt was his duty. This conversation came out of nowhere, I hadn't planned it...I was surprised and I'm glad it came up.

Amir's friend, Imran sat down next to him during our conversation. We discussed why I was there and then went ahead and asked Amir if he thought the same and he explained his family home dynamic. What he said was what I experienced, our dads worked and our mums stayed at home to look after us. He also brought up the how each person had a role and responsibility, and it was his to earn the money. He drew on Islam and spoke about Muslim women being encouraged to get an education but also said, 'I don't think a woman's place is in the home, it's just if I earned enough money, she wouldn't need to work.' They said the same thing but a little differently. There were strong references to their role as a man and how they saw themselves. I do get annoyed at hearing these views but I get why they exist...our culture has encouraged this for so long and even if as a woman I've changed, and even if I believe my role might have evolved...there is concept of roles in our culture and we are expected to take up the roles as a result. But then I wonder how women are benefitting from getting a degree when the guys are more interested in them staying at home. Where's the balance? More Muslim women are at uni than before. How do they feel about this?

As noted in the excerpt above, Amir and Imran shared a similar outlook on life, both constructed men and women as having particular roles in society, and positioned themselves within the role of a provider. Research by Siraj (2010) found that Muslim men performed masculinity at the intersections of gender and ethnicity. This was done by reinforcing traditional 'hegemonic masculinity' as a way to construct and maintain their role as breadwinner and the head of the

family, as it provided them with status, power and authority. Indeed, Connell (1995: 77) defines hegemonic masculinity as 'a configuration of gender practice which embodies currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy'. Furthermore, it has been argued that men's commitment to the role was constructed by the rejection of feminine behaviour (e.g. household chores) and imitating what is deemed appropriate male behaviour within their culture (Siraj, 2010). Research on gender relations suggests that the desire to conform to a form of hegemonic masculinity encourages males to avoid work and routines that are perceived as being increasingly feminised (McDowell, 2003; Connell, 2001). Moreover, the negative connotation in relation to feminine behaviour ensures males conform to the homogenous definitions of what their gender performance should be (Connell, 2000; Hearn, 1996).

A critical gender analysis suggests that gender is socially constructed, and that males and females engage in behaviour that is contextual of their social learning and identity. Indeed, Butler (1990, p. 140) argues that gender is neither fixed, nor is it a 'locus of agency' but rather it is constrained by social structures. Moreover, gender is not a process but a reiterative practice of discourse 'to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains'. Gendered identities are constructed through our interaction with the social world. As such, certain gendered performances makes available ideals of masculinity or femininity and guide us to which behaviours are ideal or appropriate and which are not.

Therefore, Butler's (1990) notion of performativity is useful in understanding the ways these men located themselves within a discourse of hegemonic masculinity, asserting their gender subjectivity. Amir and Imran were 'doing gender' (see West and Zimmerman, 1987; Butler, 1990) by assuming a position

typically associated with their sex through the role as breadwinner and positioning the female as being responsible for looking after the family, thus perpetuating a traditional feminine role as nurturers and carers. Indeed, this could be understood as being representative of women within their culture as characteristics such as nurturing and caring are conventionally associated with women and are highly valued within the Islamic home, thus their positioning of self might be perceived to be normative forms of gender behaviour (Brown, 2006). The notion of gender 'complementarity' has been argued to be central to an Islamic understanding that men and women's relationships are corresponding and work in agreement to a traditional framework (Brown, 2006; Siraj, 2012). This suggests that Amir and Imran were experiencing the world from a positioning that intersected gender and ethnicity, in that they used cultural ideas to construct ideological concept of masculinity.

Indeed, Davies and Harré (1999) argue that once a person takes up a particular position as one's own, he/she will predictably see the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned. Imran also placed emphasis on traditional gender roles and family authority. He did so by drawing on religion as a way to indicate a desire to distance himself from what he deemed 'stereotypical' male behaviour, while he was reinforcing it by drawing on traditional notions of men and women possessing different but complementary qualities, a position similar to that of Amir. Learning and 'doing gender' are intricately interlaced with power relations between males and females within wider cultural discourses. Both are said to have the power, but the power can be, and is, implemented differently

and typically in different contexts, for example by exclusion or by imposing deference and conformity to certain behaviours. In contrast to their male counterpart, Muslim women face forms of disadvantages at the intersections of religion, race, and gender.

Amir and Imran's observation was an example of how certain males constructed traditional masculinity at the intersection of social differentiations such as gender and race, however there remained some multiplicity within sample. For example, Umar spoke to me about his understanding of a man's role in society as well as the expectations of Muslim men within Islam. His narrative suggested a desire to distance himself from what he deemed stereotypical male attitudes and challenge the ideas of hegemonic masculine identity within his culture:

Field notes: Umar, 19, Civil Engineering

Umar told me that since he moved to uni, living alone has forced him to learn skills like cooking, cleaning, washing up after himself, which resulted in an appreciation of how much stuff his mum and sister do around the house. He said, 'When I go home, I noticed things like my parents expectations of me and my sisters...they're different...like when I make breakfast, my dad will sometimes say, "Ask your sister to help you." I don't ask her because she's got her own things to do and it's not her job to do it.' I mentioned some observations that had taken place before his and how I've spoken to some guys who want their wife to stay at home after they get married or particularly when they have children. I asked his take on the subject. He said he didn't understand this since so many women are coming to uni and he wouldn't expect his

wife to not work, rather he'd encourage it. After hearing a few male informants speak about their expectations of their future partners, it was interesting to hear Umar's take on the subject. It was a reminder that there is some change happening among this generation of Muslims with regards to how they viewed their role. But it's not ground-breaking but it was good to hear. To be fair, he was one of very few that did say this.

Connell (1995) argues that masculinity is a life project that involves the making and remaking of identity and meaning, and arises through individual's interaction with and between immediate situations, broader social structures, gender roles and regimes. Furthermore, Butler (1990) maintains that masculinity is plural and thus men perform masculinity within different contexts, and that very few men, if any, conform to a single stereotype of masculinity. It could be argued that due to the independence Umar gained by attending university, his new life experiences enabled him to question what he was taught about gender roles and responsibilities. Umar's account of how he viewed his sister's role upon his return home after living away at university further supports the view that identity is not static, but rather in its fluid nature it is continuously evolving. Umar's narrative is one example which suggests that there are some differences in the ways of doing masculinity, in that he acknowledges that men often conform to traditional masculine norms but his narrative also suggests that one cannot simply homogenise a group. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) place emphasis on the concept of a multidimensional understanding of gender and suggest that there are different interpretations as to what shapes ideal masculinity. By drawing upon the data gathered during this phase it could be suggested that informants' construction of masculinity intersected with gender

and race, illustrated by way of cultural understandings with regards to what it means to be 'a man' in their respected communities. However, some men resisted and said that they would prefer to forge a different path and not adhere to the dominant concepts of hegemonic masculinity, while others took them up.

Navigating freedom, choices and constraints

The previous section explored the ways in which male informants constructed positions for themselves and their Muslim female counterparts. A common account indicated males generally identified women as carers and men as breadwinners, and that their hegemonic masculinity were implicated and intersected with ethnicity. Similarly, discussions with female informants also suggested that some women constructed their position in society within the domestic sphere. Sofia was an example of this and her narrative indicated that she held the belief in the traditional positioning of the man being the economic provider and the female taking up a position within the domestic sphere:

Field notes: Sofia, Pharmacy, 21

'I am working hard to do well in my degree but if it came down to working or staying at home, I would probably choose home. I want to fulfil my duties as a Muslim woman, it isn't an obligatory requirement but it's pleasing to God. I want to be there when my children are growing up. I would give up my job as a pharmacist to be a housewife.'

It could be suggested that the reason Sofia was interested in taking up a traditional role was because it was looked upon positively within her religion. Although Sofia was pursuing higher education, a qualification that would enable her to gain social mobility and cultural capital (Bagguley and Hussain, 2014;

Dwyer and Modood, 2010), she continued emplotting the role of a homemaker, particularly the role as a mother to be more desirable. According to Butler (2007) the norms surrounding gender are culturally constructed and socially bounded which suggests that performativity enables us to understand that it is through the repetition of acts that we are able to learn the way our gender needs to be performed and therefore, heteronormative gender roles are learned in society. Thus she argues that it is from our culture that we acquire knowledge on how to behave in society as prescribed by our gender and it is from a repetition of acts that we learn that a woman needs to be nurturing or that a man needs to play the role as a protector and maintain virility (Butler, 1990). Therefore, it could be that gender identity here is seen as religiously prescribed and any disagreement would mean deviating from her Islam obligation. Therefore, the discursive construction of gender roles is a natural expectation for Sofia, which she accepts.

However, Sofia's account reflects the interaction of race and gender, in that her chosen position was not about surrendering to gender roles constructed by her culture, as this denies her the agency over her choices. Rather it could be that Sofia prioritisation of marriage and motherhood was due to her drawing on views of the 'good Muslim woman' in which domesticity and partnering are interconnected with education and profession (Siraj, 2012). Sofia's narrative suggests she believed it was her religious obligation as a 'Muslim woman' and thus uses Divine agency as a way to construct the domestic sphere as a moral obligation and to justify her choice. Indeed, the home is often embodied as a domestic space that restricts and subdues female desires and source of authority, yet Sofia's narrative indicates a level of agency through her uses of 'I'

to situate her life choices and suggests that she constructed the domestic sphere as a powerful positioning for her as a woman. In her strong heteronormative account, Sofia normalizes traditional gender roles and draws on women as 'domestic' and constructs marriage and motherhood as central components of femininity. According to Phillips (2009) marriage and motherhood are seen as paths to greater power in the domestic sphere and motherhood is constructed as an important aspect of a Muslim woman's life. Moreover, by using a construction of normative/traditional femininity, Sofia builds a case for her decision to choose the domestic sphere over the economic benefits and independence of working life.

However, the idea of remaining within the domestic sphere was not something which resonated with all female informants, in that they did not want to simply be identified and positioned as a mother. It could be argued that some female informants in this study were using higher education as a tool to redefine femininity and their positioning within their culture. A common observation identified was that female informants were using higher education as a way to challenge cultural expectations by choosing to become a graduate and develop of a respectable career over getting married and remaining within the domestic sphere. Ayesha and Sadia shared their frustrations about marriage being seen as the next step by their family and community once they finished their degrees. They spoke about how although they did intend on getting married one day, they did not feel it should happen within the traditional timescale which is often set at a relatively young age within their culture (Dwyer, 2000). Instead, they wanted to develop and use the skills, knowledge and independence they gained during their time at university and develop a successful career:

Field notes: Ayesha, 21, English Language and Sadia, 19, Pharmaceutical Management

I was getting back into collecting data today, after the summer break. I was excited because a brand new cohort of students had started and it was nice to see fresh faces. I went down to Student Central and it was busier than usual but that happens at the start of the year. I bought a cup of coffee and headed towards the seating area. I spent a little time choosing the next person to observe. Two women sat down in the seats next to mine. I let them settle before approaching them.

Sadia was a new student at the university, whereas Ayesha was in her third year. They mentioned knowing each other outside of university but I didn't ask any further details. They started talking to me about life after uni. Ayesha said her goal was simple: 'get a job, earn my own money, and move out of Bradford, travel...Muslim guys' gets to do it all the time.' I found this interesting, how she compared herself to the men. Sadia agreed, and explained that she felt men were never stopped from pursuing their dream, '...if anything they are encouraged. People always tell me I can't move out because I'm a woman, or travel because I'm a Muslim woman...that I should wait until I'm married. Yeah, I'll get married one day but let me do my own thing. I don't need a husband to help me' Ayesha was really passionate, I liked that but what she was saying wasn't anything new. There has often been talk about change happening for Muslim women...it started with being allowed to go to university and getting an education. Maybe freedom to do other things might be the next thing.

Sadia added to the discussion and followed on from what Ayesha said about marriage, 'yeah...they're obsessed with marriage and worry about you getting old.' She then asked my age and I told her, '24, going on 25' and then said, 'see if I tell my mum I want to do another degree she'd say I was getting old...get married and have children is what happens next after uni. But I want to be somebody other than someone's wife. I can be so much more.' What I heard from Ayesha and Sadia were things I've heard Muslim women say all the time. I've said it! So I wasn't surprised at women wanted to push back against cultural expectations, to progress towards a more substantial identity, be something more. I keep wondering if it is through education that women are seeing what they are capable of. My mum once said that during her time they knew nothing else, in that her whole life was leading towards getting married, whereas my generation the women are being given different opportunities. I think that's where the difference comes between male informants and female ones. Muslim men have always had the opportunity to exercise their freedom, whereas Muslim women are just starting to get their foot in the door. Possibly a reason for why I'm seeing different attitudes and future aspirations.

It is argued within positioning theory that it is through social interactions people negotiate and take on new positions while refuting the positions others attempt to impose on them (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999). The initial positioning can be challenged, and this leads to possibilities for an individual to reposition themselves, and thereby reconstructing their identities. Indeed, change is experienced and attributed to the opportunities to exercise agency and prompt

the possibility for an individual to reposition themselves using the wide range of potential positions with the discourses available at any one point in time (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999). What seemed evident in the excerpt was that the young women positioned themselves as being strong and independent, as opposed to being positioned as weak and dependent by male members of their culture. Moreover, they appeared to resist taking on the role of feminine carer and the feminine caring position and were interested in redefining their gender identity by drawing on discourses that have become more available to them through their engagement with university life and allowing them to embrace identities as an educated Muslim woman.

Moreover, Butler's (1990) emphasis that performativity of the body is socially constructed and interdependently created and therefore the understanding that identities are inherently unstable and indeterminate is also relevant to the excerpt above. Particularly as gender (i.e. masculinity and femininity) is considered an adjustable and fluid concept, dependent on specific circumstances of an interaction and it is through agentic processing that one is able to render alternate gendered identities. Sadia's story in particular could suggest that through the independence gained within the educational sphere and the opportunities to exercise agency she put on a gender performance whereby she rejected the notion of there being a singular restricted cultural gender identity. Rather, she was able to dynamically contest cultural expectations which enabled her to negotiate alternate choices and embrace feminine identities from interactions with race.

Moreover, Ayesha and Sadia construct university as a place where they could readily take on new freedoms and delay the prospect of marriage. Research on

South Asian Muslim women has found that the pursuit of higher education has allowed young women the independence and agency to take control of their life trajectory, and move into adult behaviour and responsibilities progressively and at their own pace therefore altering British South Asian Muslim women's perceptions and expectations of marriage (Ahmad et al., 2003; Bagguley and Hussain, 2007). Though, higher education (and subsequent employment) is seen as a way to defer, rather than opt out, of marriage for South Asian women (Bagguley and Hussain, 2007, 2014; Mohee, 2011).

In saying that they are hoping to pursue education and a career as oppose to getting married and settling down, the data suggests that there is an intergenerational shift amongst some Muslim women in this study. Indeed, there was some evidence to suggest that a large number of female informants in this study were expected to embody a particular version of femininity which is often considered to be an ideal type of 'female gender performance' within their culture. However, while these women constructed higher education as a space to feel empowered and take control over their life trajectory, the narratives also present agency, freedom and independence as being constrained through religious and cultural frameworks of meaning.

Indeed, research by Jacques and Radtke (2012) found that young female Canadian university students similarly emphasised personal choice, freedom and independence when talking about their futures. However, while they privileged individual choice that a woman can, and should, 'have it all', they generally constructed this as intersecting with the intensive mothering ideology (Hays, 1996). In doing so, Jacques and Radtke (2012) argue that the young women were 'constrained by choice' in that the discourse of individual choice

disguised the socio-political context and positioning self as responsible for their choices, while avoiding concerns related to handling a career and motherhood. Though the women in the current study could also be constrained by choice, it could be said that Ayesha and Sofia offered some resistance to the 'women can have it all' through her rejection of becoming the 'good Muslim woman' but still envisioning marriage within their life course. In telling their story this way, they narrated control over their actions and identities. A key conclusion in previous literature constructs higher education as a means by which British Muslim women are able to forge alternative gender identities to their mothers (e.g. Mohee, 2011) thus implying a new kind of freedom that empowers Muslim women. Similarly, the women in the present study also wanted to develop and challenge essentialist gender ideologies, form an alternative gender identity and assert an 'independent identity' as they did not want to be defined by cultural restrictions placed on them by their respective communities. However, their narratives also suggested that agency exists within a structural context, and the young women as agents describe their actions and identity performance in ways that are consistent with their religious and cultural framework and are imbedded in relational and meta-narratives which served to both enable and constrain.

Hijab: a symbol of a Muslim identity

The broader political rhetoric surrounding Muslim women and the hijab became central when it came to discussing female informants' experiences of higher education. During the observations, I noticed the popularity of the hijab among Muslim women and my fieldnotes highlighted the diverse ways in which the hijab was performed as well as how it seems to have become more 'fashionable' to wear:

Field notes: Atrium

I was having lunch in the Atrium and I didn't go out specifically to observe but something came to mind as I was walking past a group Muslim women and I just noticed how well dressed they were and how everything was so well coordinated. I had a flashback to the days when I used to wear a simple black square scarf that I folded in half and wrapped around my head and pinned in place. But it's so different now. So many young women are wearing a hijab ...it is definitely more popular than it was almost 10 years ago. I live in Bradford, so it's normal to see a woman wearing a headscarf. But it's worn different. It isn't just the hijab, it is a whole outfit choice...so much thought has gone into it. But I can't say this is something just Muslim women do because there is a general pressure to look good in society and our appearance seems to matter more so now than ever before. I'm just wondering why fashion among Muslim women who wear the hijab has changed and if they are just conforming to popular fashion or whether it is a way to use the hijab to break barriers. I'm interested to know why this is happening because as a Muslim woman, wearing the hijab even I'm not sure and then I think maybe it's nothing.

Literature suggests that more and more Muslim women are choosing to wear the hijab in the wake of the negative dialogue surrounding their choice of attire which is often seen as a symbol of oppression and submission, particularly in the west (Ameli and Merali, 2006; Rashid, 2016) Julia Kristeva (1991), a leading French intellectual, argued that a woman in a hijab is transformed into a stranger, and often referred to the hijab as being 'foreign' and not belonging to

the Western way of life. More recently British writer and journalist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (2014) wrote a book titled 'Refusing the Veil' in which she argued that the veil is a rejection of progressive values. Alibhai-Brown (2014) called for Muslim women to question their motives for covering and argued that the veil is a risk to the advancement in modernity and needed to be addressed to enable Muslim women progress in Western society. Over the years, the hijab has been constructed as a symbol of controversy and rarely seen simply as a piece of clothing. Moreover, it has drawn a number of interpretations, focussing on aspects of the veil and the multiple and shifting meanings, such as women's motivation for wearing it, whether it is a requirement in the Qur'an, as well as the controversies surrounding the hijab in the West.

Indeed, within western media the hijab is depicted as a means of alienation and considers Muslim women who adopt it as simply assuming the views of their 'oppressors'. However, such views deny women who choose to wear the hijab agency in their decisions and reduce them as passive recipients of male intent (Bilge, 2010). Since the hijab was a popular choice among Muslim women on campus, I was interested in using this aspect of the observational phase to understand and explore the context, meaning and consequences of wearing it. However, although the hijab has been discussed at length in literature and it was not unusual to encounter a Muslim woman wearing the hijab, particularly in Bradford, the hijab has evolved over the time and a new cohort of Muslim women are at the forefront of a new styles, of what is often termed as 'modest fashion' (Tarlo, 2010; Lewis and Moors, 2013). Indeed, the excerpt above highlights my observation of the shifting trend, in that the hijab was more than a

religious obligation, a form of oppression or worn to challenge Western interpretation.

What I found interesting was the way the Muslim women I observed and spoke to negotiated social and religious identities within their wider community and constructed the hijab as a symbol of their Muslim identity at university as well as how they chose to wear the hijab allowed them to create a new sense of identity. I used this opportunity to discuss the hijab and what is often described as 'an evolution of modest fashion'. I discussed this with Maria and her friends. Maria told me she wore the hijab after spending the previous year dedicating her time to reintroducing herself to her religion and felt with her increased understanding and commitment she also wanted to 'look' like a Muslim. However, she also told me that by wearing the hijab, she did not want to lose her individuality, and was interested in expressing her own personal sense of style within the boundaries of what she considered to be modest:

Field notes: Maria, 21, Accounting and Finance

I approached a group of three women who were sitting around a table in the Atrium, drinking a hot beverage. It seemed like a casual meeting amongst friends, so I did not feel I was going to disturb them as I approached them. I identified them all as being Muslim as they were all wearing the hijab. After my brief introduction, I was told that they had been discussing the hijab and I therefore suggested we continue to discuss this matter as I sensed it was an issue important to them. Maria was particularly vocal about her opinions and wanted to share her thoughts on the matter. She told me the hijab did not stop her

expressing her personality and was using it as a way to show a hijab is not meant to be constricting and was an opportunity to challenge popular stereotypes about the hijab. She said, 'I started to wear the hijab last summer, after my first year at university. I spent a lot of time just getting to know Islam again and I decided I wanted to be seen as a Muslim, and show my dedication to my faith. But I was still interested in looking good. I don't want to be seen as a boring hijabi, I want to show I'm my own person and you can do that at university because at school there were strict rules and I never really got to express myself there. I like trying different styles and experimenting. Just because I wear a hijab, doesn't mean I'm restricted. I think it shows our diversity, if anything.'

It was interesting to hear that the women I was encountering during the observational phase were constructing their Muslim identity to work with mainstream trends and produce creative combinations of layers and different forms of hijab. Indeed, a popular hijab trend observed was that of a high bun with the scarf draped over it. The young women in the excerpt above and others observed during this phase seemed like any other fashion conscious students attending university. Their choices could be constructed as a quintessential statement of 'cultural hybridity', located at the intersection of their Muslim and British identity. In that the women were bringing together their local and worldwide Muslim identity, with a shared social belonging to the British fashion culture. Thus, suggesting an inherent desire to belong to the subculture of being a young fashionable university student.

The women I spoke to identify the hijab as something that allowed them an opportunity for individual interpretation with many different styles and distinctions when it came to wearing it. For example, there are differences in fabric, patterns of cloth, styles on fastening it, and various different ways to accessorise it, allowing women to experiment, engage and explore the boundaries of what is deemed acceptable hijab within modern day fashion. These women were investing in consumerist culture in maintaining themselves and it seemed that they were just as preoccupied with their appearance as their non-Muslim counterparts, thus using the hijab as a way of self-expression as well as religious expression.

Tarlo (2010) drew upon Goffman's (1959) perspective termed 'Presentation of Self' to understand Muslim women's usage of clothing as a form of self-expression. Goffman's (1959) analysis argues that when an individual comes in contact with other people, that individual will attempt to control or guide the impression that others might make of him by changing or fixing his or her setting, appearance and manner with the desire to exude an appearance of how they wish to be perceived. Similarly, Tarlo (2010) applied Goffman's model to women who wear the hijab, and argued that their choice in clothing is part of their identity and presentation of self which enables them to establish themselves as respectable, zealous and self-aware. While some of the women in this study wanted to express themselves using their attire and intersected it with their religious identity, not all women I spoke to wearing the hijab were interested in style and instead argued that the hijab allowed them to escape the pressures of competitive consumerism and obsessive bodily preoccupation and I will explore this later in the chapter. However, Miller (2010) argues that rather

than linking consumerism and clothing with superficiality, clothing should instead be seen as an extension of one's body. He continues by arguing that through clothing and self-expression an individual is able to create an individualistic identity, which enables the person to create a medium between the body, and the external world. Indeed, it could be argued that hijab and fashion allowed the women in the present research to express their relationship with themselves and the external world and portray 'liberation' from monolithic stereotypes that are often associated with women who wear the hijab. However, while fashion suggests ideas of freedom and the opportunity for individual self-expression, Watt's (2013) reminds us that fashion is also about conformity as our choices are dependent on popular designs at the time. Indeed, while women in the present research portrayed themselves as resisting as a way to express their religious identity, the popular hijab styles informed their decision.

Religious agency

However, for some women I spoke to the hijab was simply an articulation of their religious agency. A number of women constructed their decision to wear the hijab and at times the abaya (a full length outer garment), as a way to fulfil their religious obligations. These women often described themselves as a 'practicing Muslims' and for them the hijab was an act of worship and an embodiment of their faith. Asma was particularly vocal about her choice in attire. She understood that there was a change in the ways Muslim women chose to dress and were using fashion as a way to articulate their identity. I recall in my notes that Asma was wearing a plain black abaya and a green scarf, which was wrapped neatly around her head with the end tucked under her chin to keep it in place. I interpreted this as her not wanting to participate in the current trends.

Upon speaking to Asma, it became apparent that her decision to cover was nothing to do with the wanting to criticise the perception of women being a commodity and as a person of intellect, but rather was solely based on her commitment to her faith and pleasing her God:

Field notes: Asma, 18, English Literature

I delved into Asma's choice in clothing and asked her what influenced her decision to keep her wardrobe simple, without the need to express herself using fashion as a backdrop, something which I have seen evolve since I began wearing the hijab, particularly during my time at university. She noted the change and began her response by mentioning how women are instructed to cover in the Qur'an, thus explaining her reasons for wearing the hijab and abaya. She continued her reasoning by expressing that for her the hijab was about keeping her internal spiritual self and external physical self in sync with one another. 'For me the hijab is like an addition to the way I practice Islam. We pray as a way to develop a connection with God and keep our inner self in check. The hijab is like that for me...it is more about keeping the outer the same way to balance it...I take my religion seriously...and I see the way I dress an expression of my religion and I feel it makes my faith stronger.'

Asma ascribed her agency to God (Mahmood, 2005), through an understanding that the hijab is an act of piety and used the abaya as a way to nurture her moral disposition. This was in contradiction to discourses surrounding the hijab which often locate veiled women's agency in resistance to Western hegemony, objectification of women's bodies and post September 11 Islamophobia (Bilge,

2010). Mirza (2013) criticised the usage of agency as an analytic frame in relation to veiling and argued that to understand the hijab we need to resist seeing a Muslim woman's choice in covering through the assumptions that she is submissive, participating in and/or resisting patriarchal conservative cultural values. Additionally, Patton (2010) argues that literature on Muslim women's choice in covering fails to recognise emerging theoretical perspectives that rejects a liberal autonomist understanding of agency as merely autonomous choice and/or resistance to power. The choice must be understood through a woman's agency and acts of faith intersecting within the broader political and social environment. In addition, Patton (2010) draws on Foucault's poststructuralist accounts of subjectivity as being compatible with the understanding of choice and states that people are not only the objects of discursive power; their subjectivity is constituted by it, and their capacity for action is enabled through it.

Summary

Phase one provides a novel insight into the social interactions and the 'dynamic social episodes' that unfolded within the field. Initially there was some uncertainty in relation to questioning my understanding of the field and what I believed I would discover (see Chapter 4). Nevertheless as the focus of the observations developed, the complex nature of identity construction and negotiation revealed a new understanding. This chapter began by deconstructing the ways in which Muslim students occupied the student space. A number of diverse accounts implied that students in general were often more likely to socialise in relation to their ethnicity, thus revealing how positions were occupied by students in the field. Muslim informants negotiated a position within

the university space in relation to the dominant drinking culture, generally embedded in their non-Muslim peers' student lifestyle. The prohibition of alcohol in Islam meant Muslim students avoided socialising in environments that included alcohol which in turn created a social distance between themselves and their peers. However, segregation was not bound by the marking of territory and the desire to remain within religion dependent social groups, instead their choices embodied practices contingent to their 'Muslimness'. Be that the prohibition of alcohol, eating halal food or wearing the hijab, these recognised differences served as a symbolic statement of their Muslim identity within the university space. The Muslim identity was important to informants and some recognised ISOC as a space that allowed them to balance their university education with their religious obligations. ISOC was constructed as being central to the formation of their university experience and was rooted in the notion of belonging.

As my role in the field increased the observations began to focus on the reasons why informants pursued higher education. Literature has often related the increased participation to certain ethnic groups to social and ethnic capital (Modood, 2014; Shah et al., 2010). Indeed, while certain accounts revealed that parents encouraged the informant to pursue higher education, others constructed their participation through personal ambition towards social mobility, thus highlighting agency in their choice. However, Muslims in the field also marked their presence in higher education in relation to their gender identity and the research explored intersecting patterns between different structures of power and how informants are positioned and position themselves in multiple categories. It was revealed that gendered identities were constructed

across intersecting categories. For example, through discussion, male informants opened and made available positions for their female counterparts to take up the feminine carer role. Indeed, certain informants identified strongly with the breadwinner role and being the economic provider was central to their identity. The accounts revealed that their desire to perform hegemonic masculinity met with Islamic notions of 'complementarity' (Brown, 2006), therefore demonstrating the performance of masculinity at the intersections of gender and ethnicity. However, there was diversity in the observations, as some rejected the notion of traditional hegemonic masculinity and preferred to forge an alternative path. Indeed, while the male informants could be regarded as agents in creating their own gendered identity, their narratives were constrained by social discourses. This is evident in the ways in which the male informants drew upon a limited range of culturally available discourses according to their communicative purposes within specific contexts of interaction.

While certain female informants resisted distinctly feminine positionings, others accepted the notion of traditional roles by drawing on domesticity and constructing marriage and motherhood as a fundamental aspect of femininity. In the example mentioned in the text, Sofia's decision to not pursue a career was underlined by her 'choosing' domestic life, thus conveying a sense of agency in her choice. Indeed, women who expressed opposition to adopting a feminine role also positioned themselves as having control over their futures with a desire to alter the way women are viewed within their communities. However, while the women's stories constructed university as space that enables empowerment and agency over their life choices, the narratives also present

agency, choice and freedom as being constrained through religious and cultural frameworks of meaning.

Throughout the data collection, I was reminded of the co-construction of narrative and that these stories were being told to me, a local Muslim Pakistani woman. The informants were aware that these stories will be heard by others and may have told stories in a certain manner and moderated their language in a way that might assert particular aspects of their identity. Furthermore, the accounts presented to me can be identified as British Muslim men and women constructing a range, though not necessarily diverse forms of masculinities and femininities that intersects with other social categories, rather than a single identity. However, the accounts only provide reference points that demonstrate individuals either challenging or confirming to these performance indicators. As such, it should be understood that the visions that the individuals constructed about their future during the ethnographic discussions should not be looked upon as definitive, rather like the conceptualisation of identity within this thesis, it should be understood as being fluid, dynamic and performative in its nature. This is in line with the social constructionist epistemology and suggests that individuals construct and reconstruct identity through their actions and interactions with the social world.

Finally, the observation explored the popularity of the hijab on campus. It was revealed that for Muslim women in this study, the hijab had a multiple of meanings, as a religious symbol and a social symbol. It provided a clear marker of their identity at a life-course transitional time, as well as providing a culturally legitimate space for young women who are formulating a British Muslim identity. While some told me that they were concerned with being embodied as 'others',

for many of the women, the hijab was not a symbol of denegation, rather they asserted the hijab as a symbol of their self-determination, agency, and independence. Many constructed the hijab as a personal choice with their reasoning pointing towards both faith and identification, while others' saw it as a way to take ownership of their bodies, their beauty and their femininity. Nevertheless, the majority of women in the study understood the hijab to be part of the modern garment that had multiple meanings, each which was significant to them.

Chapter 5: Phase Two - developing a methodology to explore student experiences within the higher education context

As stated in Chapter 3, the present research implemented a pluralistic approach in which two different qualitative methods (ethnographic observation and narrative interviews) were used (Frost, 2011). Phase one involved qualitative ethnographic observations over a period of four months in two key communal areas at the City Campus in order to gain familiarity with what young Muslim students were doing around campus and what was important to them. As such, phase one was used to generate data, identify diversity of experience and as a tool to select five informants (two male and three female) for narrative interviews. An additional phase is said to allow the researcher to gain access to a more contextual and detailed understanding from the perspective of the participant as it would enable a 'thickening of the story' (Denzin, 1989) and has the potential of drawing out a more detailed picture to the ways in which young British Muslims negotiate their identities within the context of higher education. According to Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2013) integrating such an approach into the research design provides an opportunity to gain a detailed picture of informants accounts, perception or belief about the subject in question as it encourages the participants to give an extended narrative account of personal lived experiences.

Narratives and telling stories

Phase two of the present research aimed to develop an understanding of 'meaning' and how people make sense of the world and how they experience

events. According to Mishler (2006) individuals try and make sense of their lives through stories they tell and reconstruct, and through this meanings of experiences are constantly being changed depending on the context of our current and on-going life. Stories are used to express ourselves and convey meanings that are rooted within available cultural discourses. It is proposed that the notion of narrative can be used to understand that human beings continuously impose structure on the flow of experience (Sarbin, 1986).

The narrative psychological approach has its roots in a social constructionist view of reality, which focuses on the construction of self in relation to our interactions with the social world, rather than understanding reality as objectively discernible. Indeed, narrative inquiry is compatible the epistemological underpinning of this research (see Chapter 2) and shares the notion that new meanings are constructed through our use of language, which result in different ways of perceiving, acting and making sense out of our lives (Gergen, 1999; Crossley, 2000). Our narratives are seen as a construction of that world, rather than a representation of the world. Therefore, stories are an ideal vehicle for exploring how individuals attribute meaning to 'lived experiences' and how their stories may reveal the subtleties of how lives are lived and their ongoing construction of identities within social, historical and cultural contexts.

However, narrative research has often been accused for lacking objectivity through favouring subjective accounts in a concern to represent the meanings that individuals ascribe to their lived experience (Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001) and thus questioning the degree to which the narrative being told is a

'truthful' version of events and experiences. Indeed, this would be an issue if narratives were viewed from a positivist underpinning however, the social constructionist understanding of narrative draws on the premise that reality is pluralistic and not a 'discoverable truth' (Crotty, 1998). Therefore asserting that individuals inhabit different 'realities' that are socially constructed, that narrative accounts are created by drawing upon interpretive resources available to us and that particular stories are fashioned at a particular time that in turn contribute to creating a sense of self (Alasuutari, 1997). As a result it is unlikely that we tell a story in the exact sequence that it occurred; instead we narrate a story in a way in which transforms the story into a meaningful and interesting version of our experiences (King and Horrocks, 2010). In addition, a narrative approach is concerned with the notion that individuals connect past, present and potential future experiences to develop an account of their lives, thus trying to gain a sense of coherence and continuity as they put their experiences in to a sequence (Bruner, 1990). Therefore, the relationship being that the incoherence of individual's experiences in social constructionism come together using a narrative approach which helps to develop a sequence (Burr, 2003). By collecting a participant's story through a narrative method, it ensures that an individual's construction of meaning is embraced and the connection between the participant's realities is recognised. As such, rather than considering narrative constructions as 'true reflections', the present research is interested in the meanings attributed to experiences and how these are communicated.

Moreover, Griffin (2013) highlights that it is the 'plot' of the narrative, the sequence of the sentences, the way events are recounted rather than the 'truth' or 'falsity' of an individual's story that give a narrative its logical force and its

power to persuade. In addition, Alasuutari (1997) rejects the assumption that every person possesses an 'authentic' self that could be captured in a text where a person tells his or her story in an honest way. Instead, it is gradually recognised that life-story narrating is always situational and like discourse, serves a function. He follows by noting that life stories consist of 'retrospective accounts of the past, accounts that are given for particular reasons and in particular situations' (p.7).

While developing the method to explore 'lived experiences' and the 'told story', it seemed that there was potential for students to reflect on their life course as they moved into higher education and reconsider their discursive positioning through life trajectories. Giddens (1991: 54) drew on the notion that self is a reflexive project and that a person must continue to integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into an ongoing "story" of self'. Indeed, this concept of the 'on-going' self looked to be a useful method to explore the lives of students as they progress through university and onto employment, as a means to reveal subjective understandings of self and identity. Indeed Burr (2003) reminds us that a person's identity is created and achieved by a number of different threads woven together, to produce a person's identity (Burr, 2003). Each of us has a multitude of discourses which are constantly working and evolving to produce our story, therefore, our identity is not produced from inside the person but from the social realm.

However, due to such constructs not being fixed, the outcomes can be potentially complex and with conflicting interchange of discourse (Hardy et al., 2009). Moreover, Squire et al. (2008) identify that there can be several

conflicting versions of 'narrative' and because there are loose guidelines as to how narrative interviews should take place, the way in which narrative research is carried out is open to interpretation. In addition a narrative interview is not centred on a set of questions and, furthermore, narrative inquiry lacks linearity, as there is not necessarily a discernible starting or finishing point. However, a rationale behind undertaking a narrative approach is to embrace such conflicts and contradictions:

'...we frame our research in terms of narrative because we believe that by doing so we are able to see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to bring them into useful dialogue with each other, and to understand more about individual and social change.' (Squire et al., 2008, p. 1)

Indeed, highlighting themes of complexity and difference leads to accepting multiplicity. It also reflects the social constructionist epistemological underpinning of this research, which draws on the understanding that individuals' construction of self is theoretically fragmented, ambiguous and subject to continuous change through political, social and discursive processes thus enabling the fundamental premise of the narrative approach of multiplicity to be accepted.

Therefore, collecting narratives through interview and analysing them for 'different and contradictory layers of meaning' seemed an appropriate method to explore the subjective experiences of how students negotiated their identity as Muslims in Britain within the higher educational contexts and their life more broadly. Using the narrative approach also means working with metaphors and

creating textual collages which would enable the creation of research texts that show the complex and multi-layered storied nature of experience. In this way, this research could possibly create texts that represent the complexity of people's lives and experiences.

Developing a narrative interview

In order to explore the subjective experiences of Muslim students, I needed to find a way of being able to engage with my participants successfully without compromising the richness of data. I turned to several authors in the narrative area in order to find a narrative interview framework which would serve the purpose of the research. For example McAdams (1993, p. 252) proposed that a type of semi-structured interview would serve as a guide and include 'leading people through a series of questions about their life'. According to Parker (2005) interviews in qualitative research are always semi-structured and he states that an interviewer can take control of the research by setting an agenda, thus controlling the kind of information it will produce. This would mean that the researcher would have a degree of control, while at the same time the researched would have the opportunity to tell their story. According to McAdams (1993) following on from the questions, the participants are then asked to structure their life as if it were a book, with distinct 'life chapters'. There are a number of ways participants may do this, some may organise them in a chronologically, starting with their childhood and moving towards adulthood whereas others may structure them according to themes.

McAdams (1993) method was interesting and at times appealing but using this approach would mean imposing particular themes and topics that had arisen

from the literature review, and producing data relevant to current social trends (Bauer, 1996). Indeed, this was considered to be a significant shortfall in relation to the present research's aims, as applying a semi-structured approach would mean drawing upon my interpretation of what it means to be a Muslim in higher education and not the informants' understandings and this kind of imbalance was something the narrative questions were designed to reduce. Indeed, Mishler (1986) maintains that using semi-structured interviews as method of data collection suppresses respondents' answers as they try to comply with the interviewer's agenda and are therefore not able to convey their own relevant experiences. Moreover, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that a semi-structured interview approach has an inequality as the research interview is directed by the interviewer and is dependent on the questions he or she asks informants who therefore give an account of their experiences based on the way the interviewer performs, questions, and responds during the interview. It was essential to explore issues significant to the participants and allow them to express meaning through their own frame of reference. Therefore, the way in which informants were interviewed needed to be carefully considered in order to make sure that they were empowered to speak from their own meaning frames, rather than being 'controlled' by my questioning.

Wengraf's (2001) scheduling of narrative interviewing was also considered. 'The Biographical-Narrative-Interpretative Method' uses open-ended narrative interviews to capture life-stories. This method of interviewing can take place in two parts; in the first section, the interviewer elicits response to one question followed by a 15 minute break, so that the interviewer can prepare questions for the next sub-section. The second session involves a much more in-depth

exploration of the narratives already told and are aimed to encourage responses only in relation to the topic requested. I was interested in using this method but wanted the participants' narrative to unfold without any interruptions as proposed by Riemann (2003) who argued that without a break during the interview, the interviewee is more likely to reproduce their internal understanding of their experiences.

This led me to choose a 'generative narrative question' approach to elicit a narrative (Riemann and Schütze, 2009). The generative question refers to the topic of study and is intended to stimulate the interviewee's main narrative. The aim of the generative approach is similar to that of 'The Biographical-Narrative-Interpretative Method' in which the interviewee leads the interview with very little contribution made by the researcher (Wengraf, 2001). A question is prepared in order to elicit a narrative and it is then followed by the stage of 'narrative probing' in which fragments of the story that were not thoroughly detailed during the narrative are clarified (Flick, 2009). Finally there is the balancing phase, where the researcher can ask about motives ('why' questions) and more explicit questions relating to the focus of the research project. These questions are designed towards conceptualising what happened and also balancing the story. However, the balancing phase is usually dependent upon the kind of narrative already elicited and is only required if further clarification is needed. Using this approach provided the interviewees with a platform to tell their story while postponing the structuring and thematically deepening interventions until the final part of the interview during which certain topics are raised for clarification or further emphasis if needed.

The narrative interview

The interview schedule was designed following guidelines proposed by Flick (2009). I carefully formulated a broad generative narrative question while also making sure it had the potential to provoke a narrative. Indeed, Flick (1998) emphasised that during the interview it was imperative that the interviewer struck a balance between active listening and leading the conversation by signalling empathy and interest.

In line with the 'generative narrative question' approach, the initial statement prepared that I asked to all 5 participants was:

'As you know, I am researching the experiences of young British Muslims in higher education and what it means to be a British Muslim. I want to ask you to tell me the story of your time at university as well other important moments of your life. A good way to do this would be to start from the time you first started thinking of attending university and then talk about the things that happened in your life until today. You can take your time in doing this, and also give as many details as you want, because I am interested in everything that is important for you. I would like you to tell me a story about your life. Anything that you recall, anything that seems important, anything that's important to you.'

The Storytellers: recruitment

The participants were recruited through the observational phase and were chosen using purposive sampling to represent particular kinds of stories, thus highlighting that the stories generated were research led. In the following

section I will introduce the participants, while also explaining further how and why they were recruited, followed by a plan of how the data was analysed. As outlined in Chapter 3, during phase one of the research I spent approximately 4 months in the field and one of the aims of the participant observations was to recruit participants for phase two of the research. Although, I knew the potential interviewees from phase one, it was important that they were not personally known to me due to the nature of the interviewing. The age category was also considered important and as part of the design a narrow age band was decided upon (18-21) as the focus of the research was on young students. It would also capture the experiences of a particular cohort of students who shared as closely as possible the same point of social and cultural history.

During the observations I made a decision to invite a small number of informants to participate in the narrative interviews. Informants were invited to be interviewed based on what they had already told me and whether there was indication that their stories would help fulfil the research aims. Though some advocate and have used biographical approaches to investigate how young South Asian Muslims negotiate their identity in the context of higher education (e.g. Brah, 1993; Dwyer and Shah, 2009), a narrative approach has not been used as far as I know. Indeed, the aim of the narrative interviews was to capture a range of different stories and genders which may or may not have been represented in previous research. However, in comparison, the present research aimed to explore the subtleties of how lives are lived and identity constructed within social, cultural and discursive contexts. Moreover, the narrative of personal experiences is pivotal to a rich and nuanced understanding of social phenomena. As such, my analysis offers a novel and

more substantial psychologically-focused consideration of how individuals negotiate the social milieu.

For this phase of the research I recruited 5 participants to interview, all of whom were born and raised in Bradford. It was decided that this phase of the research would utilize narrative interviews as a way to access the subjective experiences of a relatively small number of participants. Patton (2014; 313) reminds us that qualitative inquiry is not about sample size or collecting 'data points' rather it aims to explore the complex nature of social interactions and give meaningful insights into the construction of identity, therefore seeking 'information richness' in relation to the data collected. Similarly, Wengraf (2006) argues that data collected from a small number of informants, which is then carefully analysed, is of more value to the narrative analysis than a briefer overview of more cases. Such an approach, therefore, has the potential to explore, in a detailed and less thematic way how identity is fashioned.

Introducing the storytellers

Ayesha

The first interview I scheduled was with Ayesha and it took place early on in research process while I was still in process of observing informants in field. As Ayesha was my first interview participant, I did consider hers to be a pilot interview as I was still developing the methodology and methods aspect of phase two. I wanted to explore and assess the usefulness of the narrative method and to see if it would enable me to generate rich stories.

I approached Ayesha during the observational phase while she was sitting with a friend in the Atrium. I introduced myself on approach and was given permission to observe. I initially wanted to understand why Ayesha and her friend pursued higher education and Ayesha responded by constructing university as an opportunity that will benefit their future. I found Ayesha's optimism and desire to challenge cultural gendered expectations particularly intriguing. I therefore invited her to participate in an interview as I felt her story would provide further insight based on what I observed in phase one. There were several instances during Ayesha's story that make her recognisable but upon discussing these with Ayesha after the interview, she was happy for them to be included in her story, these included what year she was in, what she was studying and her age.

Ayesha was 21 years old at the time of the interview and was in the second year of her English degree. Her mother worked as a seamstress. She didn't mention her father's occupation but that he had recently died. It is possible he had not worked or was in low paid work as she spoke of the pressure on her mother to provide for the family. She also spoke about being from a *'conservative, traditional, Pakistani Muslim family, living in terrace houses'*.

Nabeel

There was a relatively short gap between interviewing Ayesha and recruiting Nabeel as the next interview participant. As mentioned above, Ayesha was recruited as a pilot interviewee to evaluate the effectiveness and practicality of my interviewing method. Although Ayesha narrated a fascinating story, I was not entirely prepared when her stories came to a conclusion and would

occasionally ask leading questions as a way to maintain the 'flow' of narrative. Indeed, these stories did not mirror topics Ayesha may have raised herself and my approach was reflective of my undeveloped interviewing technique and experience. However, despite the minor shortfall, Ayesha's interview was a useful exercise and helped me refine and understanding the method for the remaining interviews. I spent time exploring the methods of eliciting narratives more carefully and became more confident about my skill to commence the interview phase.

I approached Nabeel while he was sitting alone in the Student Central. I invited him to participate in an interview during the observation because of the way he positioned himself in relation to Muslim women, compared to his Muslim male peers. His story suggested that he wanted to alter the popular perception of Muslims and use his degree to bring about social change and I was interested in exploring these distinctions further.

Nabeel allowed me to share the following information, he was 20 at the time of the interview and was in the first year of his degree. He left school with A-Levels in Physics, Maths and Economics to pursue Civil and Structural Engineering at university. He had initially intended to study at University of Leeds but did not meet the grade requirements and had to settle for University of Bradford as his second choice. Nabeel was the youngest of his siblings and was from a family of academics.

Fatima

My interview with Nabeel allowed me to practice eliciting narratives without asking direct questions which in turn gave me a little more confidence with my

interviewing technique. As my observations progressed, I met and invited Fatima to participate in an interview and she emailed me to say she was interested in sharing her story further. I sent her the details of my research and we organised a time and date convenient for both of us. Fatima was invited because she mentioned her mother as someone who worked and also continued to maintain her 'role' as a mother. Indeed, during my conversation with Fatima, she implied that she was hoping to replicate this in her future home and I was interested in exploring her story further. Fatima was studying Pharmacy and was 21 years old at the time of the interview. She lived with her mother and younger brother.

Sara

I interviewed Sara during the final stages of the participant observation. She was invited to share her story because in contrast to previous interviewees, she gave an impression that she was not interested in being at university or furthering her career once she had a family of her own. Indeed, this in contrast with other female informants I had spoken to in the field and I was intrigued to understand the reasons behind this decision. Sara was in the first year of her degree and aged 20 at the time of her interview.

Hamza

I invited Hamza to take part in an interview while observing a group of men in the Student Central. He was very interested in taking part in an interview and after receiving a number of emails from potential participants, I chose Hamza because the stories he shared during the observational phase indicated a potentially interesting narrative with regards to how he felt Islam had had an

impact on his life during his childhood and early teens and how his approach to religion influenced his approach to life and how he envisioned his future. He was the final interviewee and a faith based narrative was an area that had not been spoken about in much detail in any of the previous interviews and I wanted to explore it further, particularly as through the participant observation, I was finding that religion was important to Muslims in higher education.

Ethical Considerations

The interview process was informed by ethical considerations as specific by both the University of Bradford and the British Psychological Society (2010). The BPS (2010) guidelines state that informed consent should be given by the participant, that there is no deception of the participant, the participant understands their right to withdraw and that there is a debrief immediately following the interview. Furthermore, the participant must be treated with respect and any data collected will be anonymised.

As outlined earlier, individuals were selected and invited to participate in an interview based on the stories they shared during the participant observational phase, thus as the researcher I curating a set of stories that related to the research aims. Potential informants were handed an invitation letter (see Appendix 2) and were asked to email me to confirm if they wished to participate in the research. Once they had agreed to participant in principle and prior to scheduling an interview date they were sent an information sheet (see Appendix 3) in order to ensure that potential informants made an informed choice before deciding to participate. The information sheet detailed the aims of the research, the nature of the research and what their involvement would entail and what

would happen to the data collected. They were also made aware that their involvement was voluntary and that they should not feel that they had to take part in the research.

The participants were interviewed at a mutually convenient time in the Psychology Observation Suites at the University of Bradford as consideration was given to the personal safety of interviewer and of the participant. Prior to the interview commencing, I went through the information sheet and consent form (see Appendix 4) in a verbal briefing, in order to reiterate their rights as a participant. If they agreed to participate, they were then invited to sign the consent form, indicating their agreement to participate.

The BPS (2010) recommends that consent obtained from the participant at the onset of the interview was not to be regarded as mandate for the entire interview but rather, it is recognised that consent is an ongoing process that may require re-negotiation (de Laine, 2000). In addition to gaining consent from the participants, steps were also taken to ensure their identity was protected by firstly addressing anonymity: in this regard, each participant was allocated a pseudonym. All interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder and varied in length between 45-90 minutes.

It has been argued that the protection of anonymity can be problematic in biographical research (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). Therefore, in order not to distort the stories, certain central details have not been changed but others that were less important have been left out during the transcribing stage. Furthermore, with informants consent, details integral to the narrative story have not been changed from the final transcript. Finally, participants were made

aware that the hard copies of the interview transcripts would be kept securely, in a locked cabinet in the University's research office, and all electronic audio recordings and transcripts would be stored on a password protected computer.

Gaining access to subjective experiences

Adopting a narrative approach in order to collect data meant that my role and responsibility within the interview setting is to be a 'good listener' and the interviewee is regarded as a story-teller rather than a respondent (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000: 31). Hollway and Jefferson (2000) mentions how instead of being rigid, the narrative approach is open to development and change, depending on the narrative experience. The aim of the narrative approach is to enable the exploration of stories for an insight into the storyteller's experiences, their identity and their culture (Murray, 1997). Moreover, it aims to capture the subjective nature of complex human experiences (Crossley, 2000).

Indeed, the interviews were guided by a 'generative narrative question' approach and it is imperative that during the interview the researcher listens to the participant's story, and that it is the story-teller who tells his or her story (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990). Indeed, Kvale (1996) reminds us that a narrative interview does not involve an exchange of opinions and is not utilised to collect facts, rather the participants will tell their stories in a particular manner and the way I prompt narratives could limit or prescribe what might be related to me. However, this did not mean that I remained silent in the process of the narrative interview but it did mean that I allowed the 'storyteller' the time and space to tell his or her story. Indeed, I held in my mind the notion that informants should talk for the majority of the interaction, and the interview would

involve me asking the opening question and then through various verbal and non-verbal prompts encourage the informant to continue their narrative. I drew on this approach as it is said to allow the informants to feel empowered in telling the stories and take ownership of how they wanted to present themselves to others using their own 'voices' (Mishler, 1986).

I was also reminded that narrative inquiry is a process 'of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and restorying as the research proceeds' (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990, p. 4). Indeed Hollway and Jefferson (2000) remind us that the interviewer does not simply prompt descriptive accounts from the interviewee; rather narratives are constructed through an active role of co-construction between the interviewer and interviewee. I therefore actively engaged with the informant throughout the narrative interview, in a manner that stimulated a conversation and involved collecting and studying stories about particular experiences using formulas such as 'tell me more about when...' or 'could you describe that event in more detail' to elicit stories as a way of clarification towards the end of the interview, which was in line with 'generative narrative question' approach.

As narrative interviewing was being used to produce stories, I also needed to be mindful that the interview is a situation where people socially interact and use language as a means to author their experiences into a particular version of events. I therefore had to be aware that interviews do not allow access to absolute stories held in the minds of informants, but draw out and create narratives through the active participation of both interviewer and interviewee. Indeed Finlay and Gough (2003) mention that we are all situated actors and

during each interview we bring our own histories, political affiliation and a myriad of other aspects that constitute who we are. Moreover, we bring multiple selves to the research and each has a possibility to be present, and has a part to play in the production of knowledge. Therefore, it was understood that as the researcher, and the 'audience', the stories would be told to me in a certain manner. Furthermore, the way I elicited narratives could limit or prescribe what might be related to me. However, while this was a cause for concern, Czarniawska (2004) argues that it is important to acknowledge that interviews do not represent anything except an interaction that is recorded and later transcribed. The aim of the interview is to capture an aspect of a person's social reality and each account will be unique, just like every interaction is.

Method of analysis

Throughout the interview process I was conscious of the research-researched power imbalance, in that while the informants possessed the knowledge and experiences the present research was interested in eliciting and controlled the amount of information they chose to share, I was responsible for interpreting the data. Indeed, the narrative analysis involves a comprehensive engagement with and understanding of the participant's experience, which results in a distorting of interpretive boundaries between the researcher and the research participant. Atkinson (1990) suggesting that during the analysis of the data, the researcher could play too strong of an interpretative role without sufficient links back to empirical data or alternatively, the researcher plays too weak an interpretive role. Andrews et al. (2013) remind us that one way to reduce the researcher power is to be aware of the informants 'rights' over the interview is

material. Indeed, Chamberlayne et al. (2002) drew on this understanding and allowed informants to access interpretations and note responses though did not necessarily change their accounts. Similarly Andrews (2002) engaged in long-term conversation with informants over initial interpretation of interview, allowing them to comment, rewrite and add to the analysis, this in turn generated new data and was added as part of the analysis. However, returning to the informant was considered problematic as the present research did not set out to uncover 'one' correct version of reality and therefore a decision was made not to ask informants to review the analysis of their interview material.

Narrative inquiry encourages the analyst to consider how 'facts' are assembled, for whom, how and for what purpose the story is constructed, as well as what is in the dataset and what is not, such as missing characters or alternative viewpoints. In addition, the researcher looks to what the story accomplishes and whether there are any 'gaps' and contradictions that might propose an alternate counter narrative (Reissman and Quinney, 2005). This makes the systematic 'coding' of data particularly difficult and upholds the importance of a guiding set of analytical principles with which to interrogate the data (Rice and Ezzy, 1999). In addition, narratives are essentially complex and open to interpretation so the subjectivity of the researcher has a particular impact when using the narrative approach (Peshkin, 1988). Connelly and Clandinin (1999) summarise the issue as follows:

'Narrative researchers are concerned with the representation of experience, causality, temporality and the difference between the experience of time and the telling of time, narrative form, integrity of the

whole in a research document, the invitational quality of a research text, its authenticity, adequacy and plausibility. Currently in narrative inquiry, it is important for each researcher to set forth the criteria that govern the study and by which it may be judged. It is also the case that others may quite legitimately adopt other criteria in support of, or in criticism of, the work. (p. 139)

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) provided a useful framework in which they argue that it is imperative that the researcher makes visible the process by which they chose to foreground a particular story, as there are multiple ways in which to analyse narrative interview data. However, Gergen (2003, p.372; as cited in Clandinin, 2013, p. 50) “cautions [that] ‘an analytical method of deconstructing stories into coded piles’ could undermine ‘the aims of the research’ by directing attention away from thinking narratively about the experience”.

Steps of analysis

The process of analysis carried out began as the interviews were transcribed and continued in a more explicit way as the transcripts were read and re-read. In adopting a narrative approach, as noted earlier, Squire et al (2008) remind us that despite several, sometimes conflicting approaches to narrative research, it can offer useful insights into different, and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning. Therefore a number of ‘levels’ of analysis were undertaken based on elements of the Listening Guide as outlined by Doucet and Mauthner (2008). In essence, the first ‘reading’ focused on tracing the central plotline, the sequence, the main characters, key words and events. The second ‘reading’ focused on how the subject was constructed: how the informants spoke about

themselves and the parameters of their social world. The third 'reading' focused on relational aspects, such as how social networks and close relationships were narrated. The fourth 'reading' focused on dominant ideological and power relations that framed the narratives. This 'level' enables links between the micro- and macro-level narratives allowing for a more theoretical account to be developed. It involved identifying metanarratives and determining how and to what extent these were drawn upon, whether they were conformed to or resisted and the implications for identity.

Indeed, before beginning the analysis of the narrative interviews, consideration was given to the possible ways the data could be analysed. The following chapters showcase that gender was spoken about somewhat differently. In that the female informants narrated their own future roles whereas the male informants discussed what they expect of women. They both spoke about complementarity from different positions/perspectives which related to dominant ways of thinking about femininity and masculinity. However, as the analysis took shape, it became apparent that while gender was one way to cut the data, there were other ways the data could have been analysed. One distinctive example is the stories of Nabeel and Fatima, in that their stories revealed a number of similarities, for example they both spoke about wanting a future where both partners worked, both had a strong desire to be good Muslim role models by contributing to society, and both came from homes where their mothers worked. Therefore, suggesting that an alternative interpretation to a gendered difference was possible, as there are similarities in the stories that transcend gender.

Summary

The aim of this chapter was to provide a detailed outline of the research design and methods employed for data collection in phase two. The chapter draws on the theoretical standpoint, outlined in the theoretical chapter (see Chapter 2), that informs the method and considered how best to access the subjective experiences of a small number of young British Muslims who are living and studying in Bradford. Several key issues were addressed: who was participating, and how their subjective experience might be explored. The ethical issues inherent in the research design were also considered and my role in the production of data was addressed. Finally, this chapter reflected on how best to analyse the data and outlined the use of aspects of the Listening Guide. The following two chapters present an in depth analysis of the narrative interview material.

Chapter 6 – A narrative analysis of British Muslim women's involvement in higher education

This chapter aims to explore the implications for identity through presenting a detailed analysis of how three British Pakistani Muslim women narrated their involvement in higher education. The central plotline for each of their stories respectively is characterised as *higher education as an escape from conforming to the 'good Muslim woman'; an educated mother; and Muslim women can 'have it all'*. Although the women narrated freedom to choose, their stories were complex, intersectional and embedded in relational and meta-narratives available to British Pakistani Muslim women. Involvement in higher education represents a context that necessitates the negotiation of identity which can both enable and constrain, rather than a straightforward forging of new identities.

As stated in the methodology chapter (see Chapter 5) all interviews took place in the Psychology Observation Suite at the University of Bradford. Upon entering the interview phase I was reminded that 'positioning' is a 'discursive process' where selves are related in conversations as 'observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly producing story lines' (Davies and Harrè, 1990, p. 48). Therefore, in congruence with my concerns during the observations, the interviews were in a more intimate setting and I had only met my interviewees once prior to setting up the interview. I was also mindful that they would relate their story in a particular manner as I was their audience.

Ayesha's Story: higher education as an escape from conforming to the 'good Muslim woman'

Ayesha was 21 years old at the time of the interview and was in the second year of her English degree. After carefully reading Ayesha's transcript, several discourses related to home, family, future aspirations and religion were identified. The overarching plotline of Ayesha's story could be conceptualised as her using higher education as a vehicle to facilitate her escape from cultural and gendered expectations, though not simply using education as a means to postpone marriage. Within this, two pertinent themes can be identified as woven through her story; her relationship with her mother and her future aspirations. As Ayesha narrated her life, she constructed herself as someone who did not want to conform to particular expectations and referred to her academic achievements and her career aspirations as being regarded as somewhat unacceptable by her peers or her family members. Although her narrative suggests that she did not necessarily have strong career objectives, she storied her future as one that involved moving out of Bradford and alluded to what she felt were constrictions both in the public and private sphere.

Ayesha's pursuit of higher education was not storied as a means of 'natural progression' or one that was particularly valued by her family:

'We have always been encouraged to support ourselves financially and contribute to the family income once a month and university was seen as more of a hindrance than an advantage.'

The excerpt illustrates Ayesha's family's immediate economic circumstances thus providing a rationale for their rejection on the value placed on higher

education. 'Getting out [of] the house' for paid work appeared more acceptable than going to university, thus underlining contradictions present in Ayesha's story. Despite findings indicating that working-class British Pakistani Muslims have heterogeneous experiences of and attitudes towards issues such as education, career, class mobility and family, Ayesha's narrative goes against much of the understanding of the appeal of higher education to many migrant families, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds (Afshar, 1989; Bagguley and Hussain, 2007; Mohee, 2011; Ramji, 2005; Shah et al, 2010). Ayesha's narrative conveyed a sense of agency and through her use of 'I' she emplotted her decision to attend university as a means to escape her mother, who she referred to as 'overbearing', and, at times difficult to live with:

'I came to university because I wanted to get out of the house, I couldn't do anything without asking my mother's permission. She always wanted to know what I was doing...I was an adult and I wanted to have a little more control over my life.'

This excerpt and the one above reveal a tension in Ayesha's story between the more agentic first person voice and her family's economic needs. Moreover, Ayesha's family's lack of value placed on higher education as a means of social mobility complicates the meaning of ethnic capital as her sense of agency clashes with their economic needs and more typically working-class values.

Ayesha's mother was a key character in her story and was assigned the role of 'antagonist' because of incongruity of aspiration between them. She storied her mother as someone who opposed her decisions and life aspirations and felt caught between their increasingly 'different worlds' thus indicating a clash of

cultures and ideologies. Ayesha recounted her childhood and adolescence as being themed around ideas that young girls should grow up to follow the traditional codes and conduct in a manner considered appropriate by the cultural norms set up by the community they live in. Certainly for Ayesha, these expectations became more important as she came towards adulthood which subsequently complicated her once stable relationship with her mother who insisted Ayesha conform to religious, cultural and gender appropriate positions and be 'a good Muslim girl':

'My cousin is a year older than me and she got married at 18 and she now has two kids. She cooks, cleans and runs a household and my mum is always like, she's such a good girl, why can't you be like her? Basically saying, get married and behave like a woman.'

Ayesha's story suggests that her mother drew on what she considered to be acceptable markers or characteristics of femininity. Research by Afshar (1989) found that young Muslim women in West Yorkshire in the 1980s struggled to convince their families that education was a valuable asset. The obligations of upholding family honour and the impending duty of motherhood played a powerful role in inhibiting the education and career ambitions of Muslim women. Certainly, Ayesha's narrative suggests that over twenty years later, the notion of women gaining access to an education and career was still an unpopular choice within her family. Ayesha's family, particularly her mother, are storied as holding more traditional views and therefore may have understood attending university as having implications on family honour (*izzat*) and her daughter's marriageable options. According to Siraj's (2012) review of the construction of British Muslim women's identities, the 'good Muslim woman' is associated with caring qualities,

motherhood, upholding domestic roles, family honour (*izzat*) and appropriate appearance. Ayesha therefore stories her mother as drawing on aspects of this dominant ideology and alluded to wider cultural values by stating '*you're taught to get married*', and she spoke of her mother as reinforcing these expectations. However, Ayesha again positioned herself as meta-reflexive and agentic in resisting these values:

'...my mother wanted me to get married. She tried marrying me off when I was 18 to some relative in Pakistan and I was not going to give in like my brother and sister. I stood my ground and made sure they weren't able to control every aspect of my life. In the end, the decision was mine. I wouldn't say I was being forced but you could see they expected me to say yes.'

The significance of 'transnational' arranged marriage has been examined in research among Muslim women and is argued to be instrumental in maintaining cultural traditional ties (Shaw, 2006). There is often a strong sense of obligation to relatives 'back home' and spouses are selected with the intention of strengthen and maintain family and community networks between the diaspora community and the 'homeland' (Rai and Reeves, 2009). Any effort to challenge these cultural traditions, particularly on the part of the females, is considered a violation of cultural and religious values, and as a result stigmatising the immediate family's *izzat*. Ayesha's self-narration navigates the institution of arranged marriage and stories herself as someone who was not concerned with upholding the family honour and rejects marriage as the next viable option. Moreover, Ayesha's decision to pursue higher education could be perceived as a way to defy the concept of an arranged marriage. According to Lockford

(2004), cultural assumptions of femininity continually represent 'compulsory' versions of how femininity should be performed. She argues that essentialism has led women to utilise agency and assert new gender identities as a way to empower a woman's individual choice over her actions and ultimately her identity. Moreover, specific research which focuses on education and arranged marriages in British South Asian communities has found that higher education provides women with independence over the degree of choice they have with regards to the marriage process (Bhopal, 2009; Mohee, 2011). Bhopal's (2009) research places emphasis on there being a relationship between educational attainment and marriage, demonstrating how choices around education and marriage are negotiated, and that the practice of marriage is viewed differently by women of different educational levels. In other words, the findings suggest that education transforms Muslim women into agents of change and allows them to affirm more empowered individual identities above, for instance, kinship identity, hence embracing and forging new gender identities as educated South Asian women (Bhopal, 2009; Mohee, 2011).

However, in telling her story Ayesha reveals that attending university represented a resistance to what she viewed as restrictive culturally prescribed scripts of good Muslim womanhood rather than university enabling certain amount of freedom and independence in developing new gendered identities:

'When my parents wanted me to get married, it was as if they believed it'll validate my existence on this planet and being married with a kid by the time I'm 30 will encompass everything it means to be a decent Muslim woman. You see, I don't just want to be known as someone's wife or as someone's mother. I didn't come to university for that.'

The excerpt above suggests it would be a mistake to assume the higher education space enabled Ayesha to explore cultural boundaries and redefine her role and aspirations. This understanding homogenises women's narrative stories and fails to account for fluidity in expressions of identity (see Ahmed, 2012). Rather, as suggested in Ayesha's account, the transition to university was not brought about through the realisation that social life imposed constraints and limitations rather, attending university was a choice she made beyond the rejection of marriage.

Ayesha continues her narrative by contrasting herself to those in her social network, which further reinforced her divergence from a 'cultural norm' in which young Muslim female students were depicted to be following a more normative path, progressing from higher education to potentially having a career while prioritising marriage and motherhood:

'...the girls at our university still prioritise marriage after they get a degree...even when they want a career, they want to be a professional working woman but they still place value upon getting married and having kids by the time they are 25 or 30.'

Ayesha's account indicates that she drew a boundary between herself and her peers over definitions of the most desired type of Muslim Pakistani femininity. Research has highlighted that while the Muslim community are prioritising women's education, marriage remains essential to the plans of South Asian women (see Bagguley and Hussain, 2007; Mohee, 2011). Indeed, this could be because marriage is considered a social obligation and a religious duty that is strongly encouraged within Islam (El-Hadi, 2000). However, compared to White

students, an 'arranged' marriage remains an expectation. A more immediate concern for Pakistani and Bangladeshi students as oppose to Muslim women of Indian heritage is that they are seen to be using higher education (and subsequent employment) as a strategy to defer, rather than opt out, of marriage (Bagguley and Hussain, 2007, 2014; Mohee, 2011). Their embodied intersectionality allows us to understand the ways in which identity has been constructed in relation to their Muslimness and gendered expectations. Indeed, by outwardly prioritising marriage and motherhood, these young women are storying themselves as transforming more traditional views of the 'good Muslim woman' in which domesticity and partnering are being complemented with education and profession. However, in doing so Muslim women risk the double bind of dominant western narratives that women can, and should, 'have it all', a frame which contemporary young women, brought up within cultures heavily infused with individualistic and feminist discourses of choice, are expected to buy into. However, this narrative of choice obscures the socio-political context and renders them accountable for their choices and any potential difficulties in managing a career and motherhood (Choi et al., 2005; Jacques and Radtke, 2012). In contrast, Ayesha's self-narration demonstrates another layer of intersectionality between gender and ethnicity, by emphasising that her involvement in higher education would facilitate the rejection of marriage (and then motherhood) as the subsequent workable option after gaining a degree.

Ayesha also compares herself to her sister and constructs her as someone whose aspirations never materialised and is now a mother of three. It appeared that witnessing her sister not fulfil her ambitions only pushed Ayesha to maintain

and prove that it is possible to achieve your goals and that they don't have to remain *'futile dreams'*:

'I remember when my sister used to say she was going to move away, she had a dream but her dreams didn't transpire and that has made me want to show her that it is possible to follow your dreams. I remember her being so certain that she was going to do it but those dreams didn't become apparent...you know like *Of Mice and Men* style, where it always stays a dream. Seeing them live a life they are not completely content with gives me more of a reason to push forward and prove that I can do especially since they didn't. My family often listen to me talk about my ambitions and look at me as if to say, it won't happen and that only drives me to want to prove them wrong.'

Ayesha, in studying, is challenging the notion that she cannot achieve her goals and is determined to have a successful career, though not necessarily re-defining gender identity as an 'educated' Muslim woman. For Ayesha, being at university did not mean she had a desire to be successful academically. Instead she said she did not want to follow what she described was the conventional life course, which involved attending school, getting a degree and then moving onto a stable job with a regular income. Towards the end of her narrative, and again in an meta-reflexive, agentic fashion, she storied her resistance to such a normative path, by emphasising that she wished to explore her potential and take risks rather than doing what she felt was expected from her, this meant going 'against the grain' of being a 'good Muslim woman' and a 'good citizen'. Her narrative can be read as a contrast between the agentic first person voice

and using 'you' and 'we' to emphasise the collective culturally restrictive voice which she resists:

'I want to leave home and even if I fail, I don't care. I don't care because at least I've attempted it. There is the South Asian mentality and the British mentality and I think failure is frowned upon in both and you can't be seen wasting your time. You aren't encouraged to grow as an individual and make mistakes. You're told to follow a system, grow up, go to university and get a job. For the world that's tangible proof that you're living and being a productive individual. We are not told to take risks. We are not told that it's OK to fail and it is OK to take a chance on ourselves. Especially if you're a woman, a Pakistani Muslim living in Bradford, you're definitely not taught to live on the edge.'

Ayesha did not construct her education as a route towards a qualification; rather she portrayed it as a means to independence, freedom and exploration. This again contrasts with literature which suggests that university is a site which enables a certain amount of freedom and independence (Bhopal, 2009; Mohee, 2011). In narrating university as leading to enlightenment, she provided a distinct contrast to the other '*differences*' she storied. Not only was difference narrated in relation to her traditional, 'conservative', Pakistani working-class background but also in relation to dominant British neoliberal, developmentally normative, work ethic ideologies. Ayesha was adamant that her future life would involve moving out of Bradford:

'I look forward to leaving Bradford. I want to see the world and I want to be more independent. People are stuck in their ways here. You could say we

have stayed with our cliques, nobody has told us or allowed us to evolve, nobody has encouraged us to progress forward or try new initiatives. If you compare it to other places around the world, I feel like we are so behind. We have highly ghettoised neighbourhoods.'

In this excerpt Ayesha is drawing on the common understanding that Bradford is regarded as being highly segregated city, where Muslims in particular are known to remain divided from the wider community (see Cantle Report, 2001). However, as mentioned in the literature review (see Chapter 1) this understanding of a racialised divide perpetuated by the Muslim community has been criticised for not taking into account the ways in which race intersects with class, in that structural constraints are related to economic issues and institutionalised racism. According to Phillips (2006) the racialisation of spaces reflects the choices of white individuals who actively moved away from the inner-city ethnic space and therefore ethnic minority groups should not be blamed for the 'ghettoised' patterns that have arisen. Indeed, Ayesha's narrative draws on this by stating '*...it is the white-flight issue. People move away out of fear and ignorance...you can't blame Muslims for causing self-ghettoisation*'. However, she also accepts that a racialised divide exists in Bradford and therefore in relation to her social world, she describes certain aspects of the university experience as being positive as it enabled the meeting of a diverse and interesting range of people and learning about a different way to practice Islam ('compared to home'), though being a 'good Muslim' in religious terms was still depicted as central to her identity:

'[Joining ISOC] in the beginning is a little daunting because you think everyone is judging you for not being as good of a Muslim as they are and

you know but the environment was really healthy, you pray more often, you're going to the Islamic talks and learning...knowledge and stuff. The teaching here is different compared to at home...where it was more like do as you're told or you'll go to hell...'

Thus, attending university was a vehicle for Ayesha to distance herself from her 'conservative' upbringing including the dogmatic practicing of Islam, her mother and family, certain friends and her community of origin, as well as from the views of certain students. She constructed her identity as strongly resisting what she storied as the constrictions of the traditional 'good Muslim woman' ideology. However, she also narrated a desire to fit into British society and avoid hostility towards Muslims following the terrorist attacks in New York and London, thus highlighting that her narrative was constructed through wider social and collective repertoires. Though she used to wear the hijab at school she said:

'I think if I were to dress like you [*referring to my wearing of the hijab and a long dress with my arms and neck covered*] I would definitely be treated different and that is why I am hesitant to doing it.'

Ayesha presented her narrative through the language of agency and 'freedom', however, in relation to her decision regarding the hijab it became apparent that certain performances were rooted within particular contexts, repertoires and different audience reactions. Therefore, the feeling of belonging was reliant upon not only how she constructed herself but also how she was observed and positioned by others.

Pinkus (1996, p.1) cites Davies and Harre's (1990) argument that 'the contradictions one experiences between the constitution of various selves

(based on race, class, gender, etc.) actually provides the dynamic for understanding'. As Ayesha's narrative unfolded, her story suggests she negotiated new identities and posed alternatives by drawing on and rejected constituted positioning's within her public and private sphere. However, in her narrative she does not explicitly state that certain powers enabled or constrained this 'negotiation'. Rather her narrative highlights a shift in positions through her challenging traditional available discourses imposed on her. Within her story there is a notional idea of 'resistance', thus inferring the perception of 'agency', which essentially takes attention away from her performing under the control of social structures and performances. However, by deconstructing Ayesha's story, there is a suggestion that her decisions are socially constrained and mediated through her challenging her opposition as an active social agent.

Sara's Story: an educated mother

Sara also constructed her story in an agentic fashion and frequently used 'I' when talking about choice. However, that being said, Sara's story also had an interpersonal aspect in that she narrated her current and anticipated future family as central to her involvement in higher education. Indeed, where Ayesha spoke about her constrained relationship with her parents, particularly her mother, Sara spoke of being part of a close knit family and her parents and siblings being highly influential when it came to her making decisions about pursuing higher education despite her initial resistance. Sara's story was different to Ayesha's in that she narrated a willingness to sacrifice a career to be a homemaker and narrated the role of higher education as an opportunity to be an 'educated mother' and therefore drew on an 'education-as-asset' to domesticity plotline. In her narrative Sara asserts that she was not career

oriented and did not see herself as someone who was very academic and yet through family expectations and encouragement and her own aspirations for the future, she persevered.

Sara was in the first year of her law degree and aged 20 at the time of her interview. As Sara's narrative unfolded she constructed several factors that led to her coming to university. She began her account by discussing her 'gap year' and how she was unable to gain 'worthwhile' employment and after several unsuccessful attempts to get a suitable job immediately after leaving school and her brother '*having a go*' at her '*for not going [to university]*', she decided to apply. She storied her family as playing a '*huge role*' in facilitating this decision and narrated her brother, in particular as playing a key character in making this choice:

'I'm not career oriented but I feel that I should get a degree because everyone in my family got a degree and I'm the last one left. We're very close, my family...I love my brothers and sisters and I take their advice seriously. My older brother really influences my choices, I respect his opinions and I think he understands because he's been through it. My parents also played a big part in my choices, especially when it came to university choices. For my parents, university was something...everything, they really wanted me to attend.'

Here Sara narrated a tension between family expectations that she 'should' gain a degree and a desire to make her own choices. However, in a communicative reflexive fashion, she positioned herself as someone who wanted to comply with these expectations as she was worried she was '*letting everyone down*' if

she decided otherwise. Sara storied her family as drawing on the metanarrative of the benefits of a 'good education'. Indeed for Sara's family, attending university was part of a 'normal biography' (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998) and she was therefore subject to subtle encouragement to study further (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Her account parallels the literature on young Muslim's families being important in encouraging participation in higher education, drawing on ideologies of education facilitating social mobility and thereby tapping into ethnic aspirational capital (Bagguley and Hussain, 2007; Mohee, 2011; Shah et al, 2010):

'I think my parents, especially my dad, felt it was their duty to make sure I had a good education because they didn't get the chance and they really believed it'll help me get a better job than the ones they had.'

For Sara's parents, a degree meant economic security and it was seen as an investment for the future in case of unanticipated circumstances. Though mass higher education has become the norm in Britain (see Nagel and Wallace, 1997), Shah et al. (2010) argue that aspects of ethnic capital, notably familial transmission, explain why many working-class Pakistanis enter higher education. They also argue that these normative aspirations amongst Pakistani parents contrast to white working-class parents who may be less ambitious for their children; the latter being a position more compatible with Ayesha's story. The familial influence in Sara's storyline continued as she described joining the Islamic society:

'I joined the Islamic Society because my family encouraged me to...they said university is where you find yourself and religion is something you

don't want to lose. I just started to become a more practicing Muslim and I'm in the middle, I don't dress in the hijab or dress modestly.'

Sara's family understood ISOC as enabling Sara to meet and network with other Muslims with the hope that it would enrich her faith. By stating '*I'm in the middle*', Sara implied that she was between traditional Muslim and Western values. Indeed, this is in contrast with research stating that compared to the first generation of Pakistani immigrants, who placed greater emphasis on their country of origin as their dominant identity (Werbner, 2004), the second and third generation appear to relate more to their Muslim identity (Ansari, 2002). According to Werbner (2002) the Muslim identity has strengthened due to the Rushdie Affair, the first Gulf War protests, the riots in Northern England and September 11 terrorist attacks. Islam is said to have become far more important to young British Muslims because of the negative stereotypes based on their religion, thus increasing solidarity amongst the Muslims (Peek, 2005; Mythen et al, 2009). However, Sara's statement is in line with Werbner's (2002) argument that young British Pakistani Muslims are part of transnational communities, which does not necessarily mean that they have to choose between being a Muslim and being British. Instead they can spontaneously move around between them and adapt their language, culture and behaviour to suit the environment they are in at the time (Lewis, 2002). Therefore people have a range of possible intersecting categories, cultures and behaviours that are found in society, which they can place themselves in, thus suggesting flexibility in the expression of identity.

However, like Ayesha, her narrative also alluded to the potential for discrimination in relation to markers of being Muslim, such as the hijab and '*the*

beard' being linked to terrorism and a potential threat to obtaining a job. Indeed, research affirms that although an increasing number of young Muslim women wish to wear the hijab, they are discouraged from doing so due to the fear of discrimination or ignorance against Muslim beliefs (Mellor, 2012; Seifert, 2007). These are legitimate concerns, particularly as recent figures highlighted by the Women and Equalities Committee (2016) found that Muslim women face a 'triple penalty' on the account of their gender, their ethnicity and their religion intersecting with the hostile anti-Muslim discourse. Although research suggests that Muslims generally face discrimination in many areas of public life due to their religious status (Reynolds and Birdwell, 2015; Lindley, 2002; Savage, 2000), Muslim women are said to be held back further because they are constructed as being passive, repressed, submissive and uninterested in working life outside the marital home (see Philips, 2009; Ramji, 2007; Bagguley and Hussain, 2014). Moreover, the Women and Equalities Committee (2016) report suggests that Muslim women face further discrimination due their cultural dress, something both Sara and Ayesha drew upon when discussing the wearing of the hijab. Although, Sara does not story her education as a vehicle towards upward social mobility, like Ayesha, her narrative account highlights tensions that came into play as young British Muslims participating in British society and education; between following Islam and continuing to be a '*good Muslim*' and facing discrimination because of visible markers of Muslim identity.

What I found most interesting with regards to Sara's narrative was her persistence in wanting to continue her degree, even though earlier in her story she revealed she had no interest in pursuing a career in her chosen subject. However, as her narrative unfolded, the reasons as to why higher education

was important for her future were further revealed thus revealing a number of paradoxes present in her story. While Sara anticipated working before settling down and having children, her narrative emplotment was based on her having the freedom to 'choose' domesticity over work or a career, by becoming a 'full-time', stay-at-home mother:

'Yeah...I think about my future, like I want to work after my degree but before I'm married. Like...when I look to the future, I mostly think about my own family, you know being a wife and having children, and being a mother.'

She also brings her mother's homemaker status as influencing her chosen position:

'My mum was there for me, she was always present, every occasion and I liked that and I'd want that for my children. My mum took pride in looking after us, we were her job.'

This facet of Sara's narrative was in contrast to research which illustrated an intergenerational shift, whereby the previous generations had limited options and marriage and motherhood remained the primary route for women and the present cohort are said to be using higher education to contest cultural ideologies and constraints and push back gendered expectations of women (Mohee, 2011). However, Sara's story conveyed a sense of wanting a future centring on motherhood like her own mother but understood it to be discouraged as she might be seen as wasting her education. She indicated that she did not want to reveal her domestic aspirations to others by saying:

‘I don’t tell people what I want in life because people judge and say “what’s the point of a degree?”’

Sara’s pragmatic rationality thereby resisted the dominant western metanarrative that women can, and should, ‘have it all’ (Choi, at al., 2005; Jacques and Radtke, 2012), emphasised by her concern about being judged for resisting this narrative and ‘choosing’ domesticity. In anticipating motherhood, and perhaps as a means of justifying her participation in higher education, Sara emplotted gaining a degree as an ‘asset’ for her future:

‘It’s the mother who educates her children and if I get married and have children, I want to be able to help them with their homework or have more of an input in their education at school. My mum’s from Pakistan and growing up I could always see that my mum was seen as someone uneducated because she didn’t take part in the things I got up to at school, or my brother would be stood next to her, translating what the shopkeeper was saying and I don’t want that. I don’t want people to see me as someone uneducated.’

Sara once again brought her mother into the story and constructs education as an opportunity to alter perceptions of Muslim women in the British context. According to Sara, her mother was not thought of highly due to her being unfamiliar with the English language. Although, Sara did claim learning English was not a priority for many immigrant families at the time and ‘*you got away with it*’ in their respective community. However, in this excerpt Sara is embracing the notion that eventually she will be perceived as a better ‘educated’ mother (see Mohee, 2011; Bagguley and Hussain 2007) as

opposed to how she felt her mother was thought of during her childhood. As Sara's narrative unfolded, it became apparent that she not only constructed mothers as being responsible for caring for their children, she incorporated a belief that an education and university life experiences will provide her with the necessary skills that will enable her to fulfil the role of a mother:

'...I feel it is my duty as a mother to look after and educate my children, like they say the mother is the first one to educate the child.'

The excerpt above exemplifies Sara's understanding that women have their role to play in society as mothers due to their ability to nurture (Mohammad, 2005). Indeed, in Islam, marriage embodies the distribution of mutual responsibility, a model where men and women are separated into different spheres of competence which operate in harmony because the skills and natural attributes of each 'complement' the other (Brown, 2006; Siraj, 2012). This position is not considered one of 'subjugation' or 'inferiority' but rather reveals the Islamic notions of 'complementarity', and considers it a 'natural order' reflecting the concept of 'equal but different' (Rippin, 2013; Brown, 2006). However, Muslim feminists have challenged the translation and interpretation of the Qur'anic verses which approve particular roles for men and women and argue that the male-dominant readings fashioned by patriarchal tenets has affected the role and position of women (Wadud, 1999). Nevertheless, Sara's narrative demonstrates an acceptance of the traditional notions of mothers possessing complementary nurturing qualities and thereby accepts that men shoulder the responsibility of maintaining the family financially, an understanding that has been expressed by Muslim men (see

Siraj, 2014). Though not all Muslim men in the present study conformed to this understanding and preferred to forge an alternative masculine identity.

Sara's narrative is significant because she positions herself in a traditional role within the home, a space that is often depicted as restricting Muslim women in areas such as higher education, employment and marriage due to dominant patriarchal ideologies. She constructs motherhood as a powerful positioning and a central component to her femininity and according to Philips (2009) marriage and motherhood are considered routes to greater authority in the domestic sphere and an important facet of a Muslim woman's life. By using a discursive construction of normative/traditional femininity, Sara is choosing the domestic sphere over the economic benefits and independence of working life. Indeed, through the 'regime of representation' (Hall, 1997; p.6), Sara could be looked upon as 'backward' and religiously oppressed due to her 'traditional' outlook (Ahmad, 2001; 2006). However, Sara's narrative suggests that she played an active role in the construction and reconstruction of her social and personal identity. Her experiences move beyond an essentialist framework that have often suppressed individual freedoms and depicted freedom as being symbolic and influenced by Western lifestyles. Rather she portrays herself as an active agent in her choices and did not necessarily use her education to forge an alternative gender identity to her mother, as seen in research such as Mohee (2011), rather her narrative implies that while her choices are not contrary to religious and cultural ideals, her version of femininity accentuates agency and self-empowerment.

The storyline of a degree-as-a-future-asset continued to be emplotted and Sara's narrative revealed that an education was not only considered a benefit

in terms of her being considered an 'educated mother', but was also constructed as potentially placing value on her as an 'educated wife'. Sara's story indicated that she was utilising her time at university as a means to cultivate proficiency and experiences that will eventually make her a more attractive proposition for marriage:

'I think men are looking for a more educated woman to marry, especially our generation. They want women who have a degree, even if they don't necessarily want her to work.'

Similarly, Ahmad et al. (2003) assert that an educated daughter is considered an 'investment' to the family, both in terms of it increasing their social status and her marriageable potential. Indeed, this can be conceptualised as a rationally driven choice as an educated Muslim woman becomes more 'valuable', certainly in the frame of social capital. Sara's narrative embodies a more traditional outlook in life; however, by using the language of agency she would often depict herself as being in charge of her future and not a passive recipient of expectation. Her choices are consistent with heteronormative cultural ideologies and this becomes more apparent as she continues to story herself within the education-as-a-future-asset plotline. Sara situates her degree as an 'insurance' in case her anticipated marriage broke down (Brown, 2006; Dwyer and Shah, 2009; Mohee, 2011; Shah et al, 2010). She narrates that her recently divorced Aunt struggled because she did not have an education *'to fall back on'*:

'...my auntie got divorced recently...and she was telling me how education wasn't pushed for them during their time, and how her parents

told her she had to get married, be housewife and so on. My auntie said that if she had an education, she wouldn't be struggling now and nobody tells you how to survive if you have marital problems or if your husband leaves you. It isn't about working once you're married but I think my main purpose for doing a degree is to have something to fall back on. I might never work when I am married but at least it's there in case something goes wrong.'

Sara narrates higher education as not her choice and justifies her involvement through an education-as-future-asset storyline as perhaps other young women might do in the context of mass higher education. However, in contrast to the wider narrative, she constructs education as offering Pakistani women brought up in Britain a means of not being positioned as the uneducated daughter of an immigrant family. Due to the promise of ethnic aspirational capital, higher education is thereby constructed as putting her on a more equal footing in the marriage stakes and providing the 'insurance' that she stories as potentially not being there in case of divorce within Pakistani culture.

Fatima's Story: Muslim women can 'have it all'.

Fatima was 21 years old and in her second year of studying Pharmacy at the time of the interview. The key plotline that encapsulated Fatima's story was that Muslim women can have successful professional careers, be financially independent, observe Islam and be a wife and mother. As part of an agentic framework Fatima conveyed a sense that she wanted to be an ambassador for Muslim women, to demonstrate that females wearing the hijab are not precluded from success:

'I want to make it my mission that as a Muslim woman, wearing the hijab I am able to forge a respectable career.'

and:

'I want to be known as an educated Muslim woman, that we can do it and we are doing it.'

In shifting to the use of 'we', she conveys a sense of sisterhood, of standing up for, and being a role model for other Muslim women. This underlines the generational shifts in outlook, agency and confidence that continue to evolve amongst younger Muslims, both male and female while at the same time, reinforces the presence of, and resistance to, existing structural deficiencies around race/ethnic inequality. Like Ayesha and Sara, Fatima also emplotted being a practising Muslim as important, though in contrast she storied the wearing of the hijab as a form of resistance:

'My religious identity is really important to me and I'm not going to be victim of people's ignorance or discrimination...like my hijab makes me a visible Muslim and sometimes I want to use that as a way to address misconceptions.'

Muslim women are often the symbol of political debates on integration, cohesion and radicalisation and Bilge's (2010) research discusses the stereotypical depiction of Muslim women and argues that they are simultaneously portrayed as being oppressed by their Muslim culture and a threat to Western modernity. Therefore, Fatima's emphasis on choice could possibly be because Muslim women, particularly those who decide to adopt the

hijab, feel a continuous pressure to defend themselves, their identity, appearance or their beliefs (Afshar, 2008), principally as they are very often denied agency in their choices. By drawing on this positioning, Fatima's indicates ownership and control, rather than a passive recipient of mainstream religious or secular narratives. Her positioning is informed by her awareness of the broader discourse around Muslims in the west and her agentic response, which values an ambassadorial/role model attribute, therefore deviates from the 'traditional' and in some cases stereotypical life course options.

This is further developed when Fatima grounded her story initially in her school background by revealing that she attended an all-girl, predominantly white, private school, where she felt she was not given the adequate support or encouragement from teachers and career advisers:

'I'm quite certain my teachers thought I'd get married after I finished my A-Levels. It probably didn't help when Asian girls came into school announcing their engagement at 18 [laughs]. I remember telling my English teacher I wanted to become a pharmacist, maybe even do further research within the pharmaceutical industry and she just looked at me, as if to say 'like that'll ever happen.'

Previous literature has suggested that young Muslim South Asian girls' gender identity is rooted within racialised discourses that uphold stereotypical interpretations of South Asian Muslim womanhood (Haw, 1988; Basit, 1997; Shain, 2003). Similarly, Bagguley and Hussain (2007) found that although the parents of young Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in their study saw higher education as a 'natural progression' thus supporting the notion of ethnic capital

through familial transmission of the importance of higher education amongst working-class Pakistanis (Shah et al., 2010), some teachers did not and conveyed gender stereotypical views of them being destined for marriage and motherhood on leaving school. However, this stereotypical view of young Muslim women did not discourage Fatima rather it became a driver to prove her superiors wrong:

‘I’d like to think we’ve moved on from this idea that a Muslim girl will just end up getting married and becoming a housewife. Yes, it might have happened 10 or 15 years ago but it doesn’t happen now. It was frustrating and I wanted to show that as a Muslim woman, I am more than capable of fulfilling my ambitions and getting a respectable degree.’

Indeed, Gilliat-Ray’s (2010) research suggests that Muslim women continue to face obstacles in their engagement with the labour market that emanate from both within and outside their own communities. It is an environment with the potential for prejudice and Islamophobic hostility towards Muslim women, bound with stereotypical and gendered assumptions about them and their ability to ‘fit in’ (p. 215). Similarly, Butler’s (1999) research indicates that Muslim women are not only confronted with sexist assumptions within their own communities but also face stereotypical assumptions being made about them by British society as a whole. Thus, it seemed Fatima wanted to challenge the traditional gender relations within her culture, but also fight against the narratives surrounding Muslim women in general. It could be argued that education afforded Fatima agency in empowering her to generate and hence ‘perform’ new gender identities and challenge the essentialism of British Muslim women.

As Fatima navigated school education, she was gaining an understanding of the possible choices that were available for her to pursue, and for her it was imperative that she challenged the stereotypical assumptions of Muslim women and was able to portray that they are fully capable of accomplishing and being a successful working women. According to Brah's (1993) research the essentialist attitude towards Muslim women within the British discourse has had an impact on their gendered identities and has thus resulted in preventing them from fully participating in public life. In order to resist and overcome these archetypes Muslim women are expressing new gender identities by actively engaging in education and embracing avenues that will lead to economic independence.

As with Ayesha and Sara, Fatima's mother featured as a key character in her story and was similarly constructed as someone who strongly influenced her aspirations. In Fatima's case, however, her mother's perseverance as a single working mother was inspirational and thus became storied as a role model for being able to 'have it all':

'My parents got divorce when I was 2 years old. My mum didn't get as much support from her family when she decided she no longer wanted to be with my dad. My mum had to sort her life out; she didn't have a degree so got a part-time job in social care and was able to look after us. Her parents, my grandparents, thought she was neglecting us by working but it never felt like that. She was always there when we left for school and would be at home when we got back and sometimes we'd go to our grandparents until she got home and that was fine, she was doing it for us. She inspires me and has shown me it can be done.'

It was interesting to explore Fatima's subjective understanding of her own social and historical time in relation to how she constructs her mother's. As Polkinghorne (1995, drawing on Ricoeur, 1984) puts it: 'in narration events and actions are drawn together into an organised whole by means of a plot'. Further that a 'plot is a type of conceptual scheme by which the contextual meanings of individual events can be displayed' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 85). In relation to Fatima's narrative, she constructs a story which demonstrates that although her mother worked, it was not detrimental to her joint position as mother and breadwinner, in that she could work *and* be a 'good mother'. Fatima described her mother as '*wanting to be a good role model*' and achieving this by having a '*really strong work ethic*' as well as substantially supporting her children's education. Fatima invests in the normative discourse of the gendered division of labour for her mother's social time and by doing so throughout her own social time makes available for herself the position of being similar and could therefore be constructed as being like her mother. Indeed, Fatima emphasised how her mother's commitment to work and family had influenced her, stating that she '*probably would have thought differently if my mum didn't work*'. Fatima therefore anticipated having a professional career *as well as* marriage and a family:

'I want a family, the whole thing...you know a husband, a couple of kids running around, being a mum, working at a pharmacy.'

Others have identified how education was seen as important to young British Muslim women, as it facilitated the option of a professional career once married (e.g. Mohee, 2011). However, in 'wanting it all' Fatima deconstructs the cultural notions that Muslim women's roles should be defined by domesticity and

dependence and argued her chosen position by using a religious approach to women's roles in society:

'As a Muslim woman, we are encouraged to get an education and I don't want any old job, I want one that has prospects where I am able to support my mum and when I get married, support my family. It shouldn't be that the men are the ones who get to go out and work. We should both have a hand in maintaining the household and I want earn my own money, I want to be financially independent. I shouldn't be told that I can't do it because I'm a Muslim woman...this isn't what we are taught in Islam. My mother was able to maintain a job and look after us.'

More than just being '*encouraged to get an education*', she asserts a position of Muslim women being able to be equal to men and support themselves and their family by securing a good job acquired through involvement in higher education. For Fatima, practising Islam was not a barrier to this. On the contrary, Fatima draws on Islam to justify her equal rights with men, thus, in contrast to Sara, apparently rejecting traditional notions of complementarity. Indeed, higher education provides women with the necessary tools and skills to build up careers which will help them fulfil responsibilities that are in principle promoting gender equality between a husband and wife in a Muslim household, thus promoting the progression of women's identities as economically independent working women. The way Fatima understood her role as a Muslim woman within marriage led her to evaluate her options along more unrestricted notions surrounding gender roles within her community. This is noticeably similar to Ramji's (2007) findings which identified that young British Muslim women are redefining perceptions of good Islamic practice

which affords them agency. Although, Fatima conceptualises a woman's right to work within an Islamic framework in a strong ambassadorial tone, there are contradiction present in her narrative which suggest that Fatima moderated her ambitions to fit in with the anticipated demands of a having family and thereby affirming the idea of complementarity. Fatima spoke about how her decision to pursue a career in Pharmacy came after much reflection about what she was hoping to achieve academically as well as personally. She wanted a career that allowed her to fulfil personal ambitions but was confused about how she would achieve it as she was also concerned about motherhood and marriage:

'I wanted to be a doctor, I know people who went down that route and it requires a lot of work. I'm not afraid of working hard, it's just late nights and long days, things like that needed to be taken into consideration. With pharmacy, I can go part-time or locum, so if I get married and have children, I can work around my family. It's difficult to make decisions when I've not reached that phase of my life but it is something to think about. I really want to be a pharmacist at the hospital, to work closely with the doctors and that requires further study, like two more years on top of the five I'm already doing. You just don't know how things will pan out, but it isn't only about having a career, you have to think about the future, but then I think I should really concentrate on what I'm doing now.'

Like the young women in Ayesha's story who are depicted as 'wanting it all', the appearance of choice expressed in Fatima's story disguises the constraints on choice in that she has compromised her choices in anticipation of the demands of motherhood. Though there may be similar constraints on choice for other young female university students (see, for example Jacques and

Radtke, 2012) there is the implication that there might not be support from previous generations (as is also conveyed in Sara's story) for Pakistani Muslim women who divorce or choose to 'have it all', thereby tempering choice. For Fatima, there was also pressure to prove she could 'have it all', in that she could have a successful career, as well fulfil her duties as a wife and mother.

Summary

The literature reviewed (see Chapter 1) revealed that through higher education, British Muslim women are able to forge alternative gender identities compared to their mothers (e.g. Mohee, 2011), thus inferring they have more choice and are more empowered. Indeed, a central theme within the female informants' narrative was the construction of choice and the storying of resistance to cultural expectations in a meta-narrative agentic fashion. The present research interrogated the idea of 'new' empowered identities and found that while the female informants utilised their positions within higher education to narrate new, alternative identities, their choices were also reflective of restraint and rationality, in relation to intersecting identities, such as race, gender and ethnicity. Therefore, the concept of choice is not fully applicable in practice to these Muslim women's personal lives as the construction of choice was also seen to be underlined, governed and contingent within the bounds of heteronormative gender norms.

For example, Sara's narrative suggests her decision to pursue higher education was not a choice she made for herself but was made for her by her family. However, as her narrative unfolded, she positioned it as being her choice and negotiated a degree qualification as providing her with the credentials to be an 'educated mother' and therefore can be seen as constructing her choice as

being empowering. Conversely, as she continued her narrative, it became explicit that her choices were also contingent on cultural expectations of a Muslim woman to have a degree as means of gaining suitable marriage proposals, thus highlighting the contradictions and paradoxes embedded in her narrative. Sara performed cultural femininity, however, it could also be argued that the ways in which she positioned herself as an educated mother and used education as a means to improve her marriage prospects was a source of power for her. Though Sara embodied a more traditional outlook in life and she was not passive to expectation but instead used the language of agency to create her choice, and therefore construct herself as being in charge of her future. Through the language of agency and choice, Sara continued to draw upon traditional cultural resources and failed to produce 'new' alternative identities for the future. By not critically addressing the cultural constraints, Sara failed to challenge the existing expectations and affirmed old cultural norms rather than exploring new terrain.

In comparison, Fatima resisted justifying her choice in relation to social expectations and emphasised personal choice. However, despite constructing herself as independent and self-determined, with the freedom to choose her life trajectory, her career and family life were constructed as potentially problematic and required negotiation. Like Sara, Fatima placed emphasis on the looking after children being her personal responsibility, whereas Ayesha situated these negotiations in the context of debates about gender equality and politics within the Pakistani Muslim culture, thereby wanting to bring about more radical cultural change.

Indeed, by applying a narrative framework, the complex negotiations in reworking identities were highlighted. Ayesha, Fatima and Sara constructed their choices in ways that presented their selves as empowered and liberated, while also having to monitor their choices in ways that were more consistent with heteronormative cultural ideologies to rationalise their choices, thus indicating that negotiation of identity within the higher education context does not provide a straightforward offering of new gender identities.

The female informants' stories highlight that while they have narrated a greater sense of agency with regards to their personal life, particularly as their lives are often the subject of intense scrutiny, it did not mean that increased choice resulted in the resistance of dominant heteronormative norms. Therefore, previous literature's structuring of empowered identities is inconsistent as it only presents identity as a site of individualised possibility, and does not take into account that it must be performed within specific constraints bound by cultural expectations. While the notions of choice, agency and empowerment are depicted as bringing about social change within the Pakistani Muslim community, the narratives also indicate that these women are at the same time subject to surveillance, discipline and criticism if they were to make the 'wrong' choice.

Chapter 7: A narrative analysis of young British Muslim men's participation in higher education

This chapter explores the motivations, identities and experiences of two young British Muslim men's participation in higher education. Muslim men are often ignored when it came to understanding their involvement in post-compulsory education and are instead portrayed as being aggressive fanatics, violent extremists or domineering (Hopkins, 2006). The key plotline for their stories is respectively characterised by as *a progressive Muslim* and *maintaining the breadwinner role*. The narratives reveal the diverse Muslim masculinities and challenge the homogeneity of the predominately sociologically-focused literature that racialised and stereotyped the understanding of Muslim men.

Nabeel's Story: a '*progressive*' Muslim

At the time of the interview, Nabeel was a 20-year-old Pakistani Muslim who was living at home with his parents in Bradford. He was studying for a degree in engineering and was coming towards completing his first year of university. As stated in Chapter 5, Nabeel was selected during the observational phase of the research due to the way he positioned himself in relation to Muslim women, compared to his Muslim male peers. His central plotline is characterised around his desire to challenge what he perceived were common perceptions regarding Muslim men, who are often depicted to as being culturally dominant (hegemonic), misogynistic and aggressive (Alexander, 2000; Dwyer et al, 2008; Ramji, 2005).

During the interview, Nabeel reiterated some of what he had said during the observational phase, while also discussing a number of additional issues, which included his decision to attend university and his desire to be an ambassador for change. What was pertinent throughout Nabeel's narrative was the way in which he constructed his identity as a Muslim living in Britain and often drew upon what he believed were the underlying issues facing young British Muslims. As his narrative unfolded, Nabeel positioned himself as having a powerful role to bring about social change and used his position in higher education to construct Muslims as 'peaceful people' and was interested in getting Muslims and people of other faiths to work alongside one another. He identified university as an opportunity to capitalise on his future and re-define the dominant narratives that are often attributed to success whilst also having to negotiate parental expectations. Nabeel's narrative had a strong sense of 'salvation' and although he faced many challenges along the way, he concluded his narrative interview by reaffirming his optimism about his future. The narrative interview began with Nabeel expressing how it was apparent to him that there is a negative perception of British Muslim men from outsiders and therefore took it upon himself to counteract those negative assumptions:

'People have a really bad opinion of us, here in Bradford. Especially us lads, people think we're anti-social and behave like hooligans. Well, they do where I'm from, with stuff like late night street races and young lads known for dealing drugs. Asian lads these days don't even know how to speak properly, everything is street slang. I don't want people thinking like that about me. To be honest, even though uni is full of Asians, I personally only know a few guys who've come here. Plus it's Bradford, there are

Asians everywhere. But I don't think we're doing that well in terms of benefitting our communities. Like the lads I went to school with didn't really care about doing well at school. I look at it this way, why aren't Muslims rising above it and proving people wrong? Because they see religion first and think all Muslims are like this. We need to improve our relations with at least the locals I guess, sometimes, that's all you can do. If we actually integrated into our communities that we live in and actually got to know one another, maybe we wouldn't have these problems and we'd be seen as being useful and contributing. Coming to uni is the start for me at least, because I want to show that we're not all like that. To try and show a more positive behaviour and that we're hard workers.'

The story above illustrates Nabeel's desire to position Muslims in a more favourable light by using his participation in higher education to construct a positive rhetoric surrounding British Muslims and resist the stereotypical depiction associated with British Muslim men. Indeed, as stated in the Introduction as well as the literature review (see Chapter 1) there has been considerable political, academic and media attention given to Pakistani Muslims in recent years, with interest in British Muslim communities increasing due to events such as the Rushdie Affair and the Gulf War. However, since the events of 9/11 and the London bombings British Muslims have been in the spotlight more than ever. Research has suggested that these events have resulted in British Muslims being depicted as a 'problem status' (see Alexander, 2000; Archer, 2001; Ramji, 2005). Additionally, the 2001 riots in Bradford resulted in a number of reports discussing a breakdown in 'community cohesion' and 'segregation' as being the leading cause of the riots, and portrayed young Asian

men as being aggressive, disorderly and assertive (Ouseley, 2001; Cantle, Report, 2001). Asian Muslim male youth have also been recognised as regularly underachieving in both the education sector and the labour market (Brown, 2000; Dale et al., 2002). Indeed, some of what Nabeel says is consistent with popular discourses surrounding Muslim men and his story is grounded in what he constructs himself not to be, in relation to the common misconceptions. The excerpt above conveys a sense of agency and prompts the need to distance himself from the wider ethnic community. His narrative is a contrast between the agentic first person voice and using 'we', which suggests affiliation with being a Muslim. However, Nabeel distinguishes between himself and those in his social network as a way to illustrate his desire to fit into British society and resist being discursively positioned as a stereotypical British Muslim man, a theme that runs through his narrative. Indeed, such actions were also identified in research by Dwyer et al (2008), who found young British Pakistani Muslim males from a middle-class background fashioned their pursuit of higher education as means to position themselves to be different from the traditional dominant male peer culture. Being a Muslim in Britain, means experiences of race, class and gender intersect with the hostile anti-Muslim rhetoric and within these spaces, young people, like Nabeel are negotiating the disruption through a range of raced, classed and gendered identity strategies which they embody through language and culture.

As Nabeel continued his narrative, it was evident that his decision to attend university was multi-layered and thus provided a complex story. He attributed his desire to gain a qualification to fulfil his parents' aspirations for him while

also conveying a sense of agency and need to fulfil personal ambitions and goals:

‘We used to live in a rough neighbourhood and my parents were always worried I’d end up hanging out the wrong crowd so they always pushed me to do well at school. They always came to parents evening and always wanting to know where I was. I mean for them it’s always been about getting a good degree and earning money, which I totally respect because it’s important and coming to uni is about getting a good education and getting a good job. But I also want to use my knowledge of infrastructure and go to places like Africa and help the infrastructure there. In Islam, we are always told to help others, I can always come back and work here but I want to see what I can do for them. But I don’t think my parents get that or ever thought of the benefits of having a degree. It’s always about it being useful to use financially.”

Nabeel’s excerpt frames his future ambitions broadly and demonstrates how his pursuit of higher education was not merely an instrument for economic advancements. He storied his parents as drawing on the meta-narrative benefits of a ‘good education’, an account similar to the literature on young Muslim’s families being important in encouraging participation in higher education (Modood, 2004; Shah et al., 2010; Zhou, 2005). However, ethnic social capital is also said to be deterministic as it suggests that young people lack agency in the active construction of their identities. In addition, seeing their academic success as a result of a broad class structure is potentially constraining as it leaves little room for choice and complex processes of interaction between individuals and wider social structural circumstances

(Mellor, 2011; Bagguley and Hussain, 2014). Indeed, Savage (2000) notes that it is important to consider how individual identities embody aspirations whilst at the same time understand how these identities and aspirations are understood in relation to experience. Nabeel stories a degree of agency in his career choice as he is resisting the discursive pull towards a well-paid career expected by his parents and acquisition of a degree was constructed as providing Nabeel with the adequate qualifications to help others. Instead, Nabeel storied his position in higher education as allowing him to fulfil a 'good Muslim' role which meant actively engaging with charitable work, and adopting a humanitarian perspective toward other people.

Indeed, Nabeel's approach was unusual in comparison to what was said by other male informants during the observational phase (see Chapter 5), as many of the informants observed identified university as a means of financial security which was generally accepted as being a normal expectation by those aspiring towards getting a degree. They drew upon the ideologies of education facilitating social mobility and thereby enabling them to fulfil the traditional masculine role as breadwinners. However, Nabeel was quick to reject this contextualised construction of education within the wider discourse of masculinity and what it means to be a man:

'I come from a, what people call a 'modern' family. Like my dad is self-employed and my mum works as translator at a health clinic. So they both work and have done since I was a kid. That's normal for me. I didn't realise that wasn't normal for everyone. I mean I did but I just like didn't see it as a big deal. When I picture my future, I don't see myself with a wife that stays at home with the kids. I hear a lot of guys say that but I just think

I get bored sitting at home all day, wouldn't she? Ideally, I want to get married to someone who is forward thinking, and is ambitious, like I am. So we can build a life together and be on a similar wavelength. So I want her to be educated and I would encourage her to work after, like when we have children. Basically, it's her choice. I'm happy with whatever suits our situation plus things like this can't be decided before they even happen.'

In telling his story this way, Nabeel draws on a counter-narrative of masculinity, by distinguishing himself as being different in comparison to his peers and this is echoed in his construction of traditional gender roles. In this excerpt Nabeel is resisting the dominant concepts of hegemonic masculinity and is seeking to forge an alternate path. In Chapter 5, positioning theory (Davies and Harré, 1990) was drawn upon to theorise how positions can be taken up, constructed and resisted. Indeed, what Nabeel seems to be doing is adopting and defending a chosen version of masculinity and resisting a version of Muslim masculinity that has dominated the Bradford landscape after the 2001 riots. As stated in the literature review (Chapter 1) Muslim men in Bradford are often constructed as aggressive, hostile and domineering (Mythen et al, 2009; Dwyer, Shah, and Sanghera, 2008; Archer, 2001) and as such it seems Nabeel wanted to adopt an alternative narrative that sought to present a positive version of Muslim masculinity. Moreover, he is challenging a position assumed by another and constructs an account which demonstrates the way in which he resists, rejects and re-conceptualises dominant masculinities in favour of constructing a progressively socialised self (Connell, 2005). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) place emphasis on the concept of a multidimensional understanding of gender and suggest that there are different interpretations as to what

constitutes ideal masculinity. Nabeel's narrative provides an insight into his commitment to project himself as being separate to the dominant cultural understanding of masculinity with which he is familiar, and wanted to reconstruct his gender identity to produce a positive performative masculinity (Connell, 2005). Nabeel's story suggests he is pursuing a 'respectable' (Skeggs, 1997) masculine identity this includes helping others, as noted earlier, as it would be considered of value and recognised in wider society. Moreover, he constructs himself as having the ability to position himself as different through the benefits of multiple axes of identity: an education, outlook on life and religious identity, all of these intersections contribute to create a distinct sense of self.

Furthermore, Nabeel contextualised his positioning by discussing the role of Muslim women and narrated his story in a relational manner by drawing on his parents' situation as a model example. Nabeel described his family dynamics as one where both his parents worked and therefore structurally locating his story as being informed by historical actors and cultural narratives. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) women are central when it comes to the process of constructing a masculine identity, for example, as mothers, as school friends, as girlfriends, as wives and so on. Nabeel constructs a story which demonstrates his mother as an example of a working woman and by focussing on meaning, associations and experiences of the space within the home he anticipated his future wife as having a professional career while also giving her agency in her choice. However, towards the end of the excerpt Nabeel subtly implies that he has some expectations of a mother being the main carer with the option to work if she wants to, rather than him being prepared to be

substantially involved in the caring, therefore, asserting traditional gender roles though not explicitly.

As Nabeel continued his narrative, he moved on from discussing the gender inequalities he witnessed within his own community and began drawing on his concerns regarding racialised inequalities within the labour market. He constructed a belief that he would have to 'work much harder to get noticed in a white-man's world' and explained why he felt this way a little further:

'My course isn't very popular with Asians...they usually do the science based courses or like Business Studies. When I finish uni and start to look for jobs, I think I'm going to have to work a lot harder to find a decent one that's related to my degree than say if I had decided to do Pharmacy. I do think it's harder for Muslims to find jobs in certain fields, and I think being a Muslim can sometimes work against you, so it is difficult to get recognised in the job market.'

Although structural disadvantage and race inequality were not always overtly articulated during the collection of the field data, there were some occurrences during the narrative interviews with female informants where Muslim women related their concerns about finding a job upon graduating (see Chapter 8). In particular, informants who had considered wearing the hijab outlined their anxieties of gaining future employment in their chosen vocation as they believed their attire may affect their chances (see Chapter 8). According to Savage (2000) the labour market in the UK is characterised by deep racialised inequalities and although on average young Muslims leave university with a higher qualification than their British White counterparts, there is evidence to

suggest that this does not translate into privileged position in the labour market (Reynolds and Birdwell, 2015). Moreover, Lindley's (2002) research found that Muslims suffer an additional disadvantage in the labour market due to their religion, thus suggesting that Muslims are more likely to be unemployed due to their Muslim status religious identity. It should also be acknowledged that although Nabeel, as a British Muslim, may struggle to secure a job, he is 'recognised' due to the 'hypervisibility' (see Jaspal and Cinnirella, 2010) of Muslims in the West and his Muslim identity may well be apparent only because of his name.

The potential lack of economic opportunities due to religious identity could, therefore, be argued to be a reasonable concern for Nabeel; however the changes, or rather the demise of the 'traditional bureaucratic career' over the years should also be taken into consideration (Brown and Scase, 2005). Historically, the depiction of graduates entering elite jobs has changed considerably over the past decade, in that there is no relationship between students' participation in higher education and their success in the labour market. As such, a university education is far less of a clear institutional passage towards specific types of 'graduate' jobs due to a changing labour market in which graduate access to professional and management level jobs has become reshaped.

Nabeel storied his educational credentials as a vehicle to avoid downward mobility (see Beck, 1992; Ainley, 1994; Ainley and Allen, 2010) and a guaranteed entry into the professional working world. Although Nabeel's narrative suggests his ambitions were not solely constructed towards upward social mobility; he does story the pursuit of educational credentials as

increasing his chances of securing occupational mobility. Indeed, literature maintains that any engagement with education requires some expectation of upward social mobility (Beck, 1992) and according to Brown and Scase (2005) this is most commonly found in the working class, ethnic minorities and a large proportion of female students. Nabeel's narrative suggests that his construction of higher education harboured what can be described as conventional views around 'traditional bureaucratic careers' (Brown and Scase, 2005) and made a direct correspondence between higher education credentials and entry into the professional working world, thereby developing a view that he will have a direct return from his achievements in education. Although Nabeel's anticipation of a clear life trajectory meant he constructed an idealised view of the labour market as a way to overcome racial inequalities. He did this by drawing on his 'riskier position within the system' and reflexively adopted a 'meritocratic discourses' (Archer et al., 2001):

'That being said, I'm not going to be disheartened or give up at the first hurdle. I came to uni to prove I am capable and also that I can achieve it, no matter how hard it might be. I think I have the qualities and really it's up to me to push myself and get the most out of it. I can go around blaming someone else but then I won't be doing anything that'll bring change to my circumstances.'

Indeed, Nabeel's narrative indicated that he was aware of the structural factors that might impinge his career prospects but in this excerpt he showed tendency to position himself as an active agent in negotiating his application towards employment. In doing so, he constructed a strong agentic understanding of the labour market and career progression and storied his future as being in his

control through agentic negotiations and personal resources. According to Nabeel in order to perform purposefully in society, one must possess a sense of agency (Côté, 1997) and was therefore not willing to blame others for how he was positioned in society but rather wanted to assume responsibility for his actions and the consequences. By constructing a place in the labour market through engagement with the inequalities and 'taking on' barriers he could potentially mean he has the agency in overcoming the social and economic structures that might be factored into his employability and by rejecting this notion, it may lead him to blame himself if he is unsuccessful in his future labour market outcomes. Moreover, recent trends indicate that young people in general are finding it harder to get started in life after graduating and Nabeel's story suggests that while dealing with this aspect of his identity, he also has other intersecting structures to contend with because of his ethnicity.

As Nabeel's story progressed, he began to concentrate on narrating his time at university and the different layers of his experiences as a Muslim in Britain were drawn upon. Earlier, Nabeel drew on the narrative of agency to bring about social change by persevering in the face of possible failure and disappointment. However, his narrative took a reflexive turn and there was a shift from him being optimistic and hopeful to showing signs of defeat, particularly when it came discussing the first couple of months as a student at university. This turning point in Nabeel's narrative reveals an important insight into the struggles that he was facing in terms of his Muslimness and self-identity. He constructs school as a private secure sphere due to its familiarity and entering higher education meant leaving this source of comfort and entering a more public domain. Nabeel's narrative suggests that the schools he attended, both primary and

secondary, predominately had individuals from a Pakistani Muslim background and therefore before entering university, he made a decision to avoid restricting his social group to just Muslims. Nabeel storied university as an opportunity to broaden his peer group and socialise with a diverse group of people by making new friends and ‘breaking barriers’ because he felt that Muslims in the UK are ‘too comfortable in their communities’:

‘I think as you get older, you have to learn about it...it is your responsibility as a young adult to learn about people from other cultures and religions and not avoid it because you think your religion is superior, if you get what I mean? Obviously don’t compromise your religion but like see what’s out there. So before I came to uni, I had never really had a chance to hang out with people other than my Pakistani friends, because of the school I went to, where there were mostly Asians. So, I decided it would be good to get to know other people that weren’t Pakistani, or Muslim. I wanted to get to know people whose culture I wasn’t familiar with, and I already knew there weren’t going to be many Asians on my course.’

Nabeel initially narrated a story of optimism when it came to befriending individuals from a different ethnic background to his own, particularly as his chosen course was generally studied by individuals from a White British background. The narrative tone (McAdams, 2003) Nabeel used to convey his story suggests that he was keen to challenge the popular assumption that suggest Bradford Muslims actively live segregated lives. Instead, Nabeel’s story counters the discourses around Muslims and self-segregation (Cantle Report, 2001; Ouseley, 2001) as he desires to experience and understand a variety of cultures. However, upon arriving at university Nabeel constructed an

unwelcoming narrative by his British White non-Muslim peers on the course and often felt his efforts to get to know them were not reciprocated:

“...it’s taken me a semester and a half to get to know the White students on my course. They really like to keep themselves to themselves, if that makes sense. Which I didn’t expect, I did a little but then I began to think maybe it’s because I’m a Muslim. And like once my presentation group went out together, they wanted to go for drinks and they invited me along, but I apologised and said it’s not my scene because obviously I don’t drink. But, it became an issue, like, ‘oh that’s weird’ and made it into an issue and I explained why. Which made me become more aware of my Muslimness, if you know what I mean. As in we know we’re a big deal, not in a good way, but to certain people hold issue to it but I didn’t get it until now. Like me being a Muslim means certain things to certain people. It was little things like that, and you see the differences.”

Nabeel’s account is consistent with what was observed in the field (see Chapter 4), in that there was obvious segregation of groups in the student spaces. However, as Nabeel’s story suggests, segregation might not always be chosen but it was the easiest option as he subsequently found himself having to explain the different values, behaviours and lifestyles to seemingly bemused non-Muslim course peers, particularly when it came to socialising outside the lecture theatre. He drew upon a discursive assumption that his religious identity was the reason for the rejection, and this awakened a feeling of not belonging, mindfulness of his religious affiliation and disruption of his everyday environment. Indeed, this sense of difference or otherness has been a common finding in studies of ethnic identity in minority groups (e.g. Hopkins, 2011) and is

could be argued that as an emergent adult (Arnett, 2000), the awareness of the differences is further heightened due to Nabeel's new social situations where he was encountering individuals who were not Muslim.

May (2013), reminds us that an individual can make claims for belonging, which others either reject or accept. Therefore, mere familiarity to a place, a group of people, or culture is not enough for us to gain a sense of belonging. The idea of belonging is loaded with positive connotations and enables a sense of ease with one's surroundings. Yet, as Nabeel reflects on his first semester at university, he constructs himself as struggling to engage with his peers and storied a sense of uneasiness and not belonging. According to Giddens (1991) our 'ontological security' is overwhelmed when our immediate social context becomes less predictable, and comfortable for us, and so we no longer feel we fit with our surroundings. Nabeel's narrative reconstructs the rejection as a sense of 'otherness' and as he struggled to befriend his contemporaries, Nabeel decided to join the University of Bradford's Islamic Society (ISOC) to seek out familiarity. Indeed, research by Song (2012) found that Muslim students would often join ISOC as a way to enhance their faith and assert their 'public ethnicity'. However, in comparison, Nabeel stories his decision to join ISOC as a means to make friends as he felt rejected in his efforts to integrate with those on his course. This meant turning towards members of his minority group for support, to heighten a sense of commonality, help define his Muslim identity and give him a positive sense of belonging:

"I did end up joining ISOC, just to make some friends and enjoy uni. It did help me in terms of me being more religious, I've started to pray and stuff which is good. So I'm glad I got to do that in a way because I feel a

stronger connection with Islam. Also I've made some good mates and it's nice to know people have your back."

Here, Nabeel employs his religious identity as a source of security and reconstructs his position within Islam. According to Phinney and Ong (2007) the self-identification as a group member is a key aspect of the feeling of belonging and commitment. Indeed, university has often been constructed as an important period in which emergent adults re-examine the beliefs they learned in their families and form a set of beliefs that is a product of their own independent reflections (Arnett, 2000). Furthermore, Baumeister and Leary (1995: 497), argue that belonging is a 'powerful, fundamental, and extremely pervasive motivation', and crucial aspect of being a person, in 'who and what we are' (Miller, 2003). As such, Nabeel's embodied intersectional identity is both chosen and imposed, in that he did not feel he belonged on his course and sought belonging through ISOC. Although Nabeel's narrative implies the development of a strong Muslim identity during his time at university, he was also aware of the differences and did not want to draw a boundary between self and others:

"Like I said before, they did treat us a little differently, and I felt it a lot while at uni this year but you can't be put off by it....of course they might have an opinion of you and don't live up to it, try and get to know them. You see each other in lectures every day, you don't have to be best friends, just get to know them. I always feel that there are issues out there that need to be dealt with. Just really break those boundaries and many Muslims aren't willing to do that. Yeah, so the guys were quiet to begin with but they got to know the Muslim lads, before they wouldn't even acknowledge us, well that's how it felt. I didn't want to just stop getting to know the lads on my

course, so I put together a 5-a-side football games and we do that like every Wednesdays. It's such a great way to break barriers, and have some commonness. I still believe we need to do something, and maybe my way is the football route. Now we are actually on first name terms [laughs], but I think that happened because the lecturer placed us in groups, if we formed groups ourselves you would definitely see the split, Muslims with the Muslims, White with the Whites. But that boundary does need to be broken, we need to talk about the issues...discuss common grounds, whereas some people just think 'Oh, forget it, I can't be arsed', people have that mentality; they find it comforting to stick with their own kind. We really need to have an open mind about it all."

In Chapter 5 I highlighted the themes of kinship and connections and the duality of Muslim social identity was at times defined by the boundaries between the in-group and out-group. In terms of the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), these may represent cognitive boundaries that are salient to a young person's self-categorisations. However, a sense of belonging was argued as a powerful affective dimension among emergent adults who self-identify as a Muslim. However, in contrast it could be argued that Nabeel narrated agency and instead of embracing and capitalizing on othering, he drew up strategies which can be understood as resistance towards being relegated to the position of the other.

Nabeel constructed his degree as a means to bring about social change by challenging common understandings to Muslims living in the west. Indeed, his first step to achieve this goal was to participate in higher education in order to aid discrepancy between him and his Muslim male peers. Once at university,

Nabeel consciously pursued to integrate with students from other ethnic backgrounds on his course. However, this was more difficult than he had initially anticipated and his story reveals complexities about loyalties, self-discovery, sense of belonging and agency of others.

Hamza's Story: maintaining the breadwinner role

In exploring his motivations for pursuing higher education, Hamza draws on a number of issues that intertwine to reveal a complex narrative. Hamza was studying Optometry at the time of the interview and situates himself at the centre of what he defined as a significant period in his life, and constructed education as something that would provide him with life-long benefits. Hamza's narrative suggests that he had very clear career goals and used his religion as a source of inspiration to lead a better life. He drew on his religious identity a number of times throughout his story as a way to situate and explain his positioning, particularly when it came to discussing what he considered his role to be as a man.

Hamza began his narrative by storying himself as a rebellious teenager and although he was capable academically, he did not take school seriously and believed his teacher had given up on him due to behavioural issues:

"At school, I was a pretty much chiller, messed about, you know the standard stuff. There was a group of us who were a little disruptive and we were typical boys, wasted time, didn't take school seriously. I was in detention a lot, I rarely did my homework and I just got into a load of trouble. It was the lads who would behave like that really. Us lads would just call out random answers and all the girls in my class worked really

hard, girls generally do, don't they? We boys, mature later than girls. Boys just want attention all the time. My teacher called me an attention seeker once, probably didn't think I would make something of myself because I was so annoying in her class."

The excerpt above illustrates and alignment by Hamza with some of the common features of 'laddish' behaviour, such as the tendency to disrupt lessons and disassociating oneself from learning (Frosh et al., 2002). Here, it could be argued, Hamza stories his behaviour as a way to avoid being associated with 'the feminine' and positions academic achievement and maturity as feminine traits. Hamza's school friends also played an important role in his storyline thus suggesting his peer group culture perhaps made available dominant versions of masculinity which influenced the way in which he constructed, negotiated and performed masculinity. Indeed, O'Donnell and Sharpe (2000) remind us that boys often construct their masculinities through the process of imitation and evaluating themselves against each other within peer groups. Therefore Hamza's 'laddish' construction could be linked to the performative nature of masculinity (Butler, 1990) in order to gain popularity and maintain his status amongst his peers. Much of the previous research on masculinity highlights how peer group participation and embracement of individuals informal cultures makes available different versions of masculinity (see Frosh et al., 2002; O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000) and Hamza's story provides an insight into some of the dominant versions of masculinities that may have been available to him, though not exclusive to his culture. However, it should be noted that Hamza's 'laddish' construction did not affect his academic achievement, and achieved relatively good GCSE grades. Therefore, proposing

that while he may have wanted to maintain a high status construction of masculinity, he was still capable of maintaining achievement. Yet at the time, Hamza's disruptive behaviour resulted in him being excluded from secondary school, a period he constructs as being significant:

"My behaviour eventually got me thrown out of school, and I was sat at home for a while before they found me another school. It was a turning point, I guess because I was 14 and I was going to start Year 10, and it wasn't like my grades were bad or that I wasn't able to do well. I had disappointed my parents and when people found out their kid got thrown out of school, it didn't look good. My mum stopped talking to me for a while. Someone once referred to me as the 'black sheep' of the family because my parents never had trouble with the rest. I was the one who always caused the problems. I just had the time to think about it, I realised I must have been really annoying in class and just that I'm wasting my time. My dad once said that if I didn't put my head down, I'd probably end up like him or my uncles, working as a taxi driver or in a take-away. I didn't want that. I didn't want to be seen as someone who did that. People respect people with an education. You can't be a waster your whole life."

In the excerpt, Hamza emplots his time at home as a reflexive period and constructs a resistance towards what he describes as a normative path for young working-class Muslim men of finding employment in a take-away or as taxi drivers. Indeed, this may have been in reference to the lack of jobs available in Bradford (see Husband, 2000; City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, 2010; 2013), as well as in relation to some of the male members of his extended family. Hamza's account indicated that he did not want an undefined

future, where there was job uncertainty and no opportunity for a stable career. Moreover, it appears Hamza constructed success in terms of the status education brings and a respectable career carries. In doing so, he was storying his presence in higher education as a means of social mobility and draws on ethnic social capital (see (e.g. Bagguley and Hussain, 2007; 2014; Modood; 2004; Mellor, 2011; Shah, Dwyer and Modood, 2010) as a way to fulfil his economic needs and was encouraged by the understanding that his family might be disappointed if he decided otherwise. Hamza continued his narrative in a reflexive, agentic fashion and storied his pursuit of higher education in a dualist manner by drawing on individualism in addition to social structures as contributing factors. Hamza initially drew on parental encouragement as being an important facet in his pursuit of higher education:

“All my brothers and sisters went to uni, and so I was the last one who my parents kinda pushed. But obviously, I wasn’t the best student so I don’t think they put that much effort in making sure I got into uni. They did but I sometimes don’t think they expected me to do well until they saw me pass my GCSE’s. I don’t blame ‘em, I was shocked that I got some grades. But for them it was always about earning money, being secure financially, and just not worrying about money. My dad always said he pushed me because he didn’t like the idea of me not being left behind because everyone else had a degree and a good job.”

Hamza storied his father as drawing on ideologies that academic credentials facilitate social mobility. Indeed, parental encouragement was discussed in Chapter 5 and informants storied their parents as constructing meta-narratives of their experiences of immigration as a way to transmit the importance of

higher education. Similarly, Hamza's pursuit of higher education is initially located within the private sphere and he narrates how his parents drew on practical and contextual knowledge to communicate the importance of academic credentials. Indeed, this supports the view that ethnic minority parents transmit the importance of education through ethnic capital aspirations (Thapar-Bjokert and Sanghera, 2010; Modood, 2006; Ahmed, 2001). However, as Hamza's story unfolded he began to construct a story which demonstrated his decision to pursue Optometry in a more agentic first person voice by frequently using 'I' and constructing higher education as a vehicle towards upward social mobility and aspiration towards social capital:

"It wasn't just that I want a job; I have had to plan this. I thought about it and also thought about what I was capable of. I didn't want to do any pointless degree. I chose something that I knew would get me a job in the end, without having to beg for a job. It would have been stupid of me to do something daft like English Literature or Drama. I know so many people who did that. I went to school with these really intelligent people and one guy went to do Marine Biology. It doesn't make sense. Why? What's the point? I think, especially for me, it was a choice between what I enjoy and what will actually get me a job. Everyone knows it is difficult to get a job after a degree. I enjoy playing football but that isn't going to help pay the bills. My parents didn't say just get a degree, it was more like get a useful degree or don't bother gettin' one at all and I agree."

Hamza's excerpt demonstrates his preparedness to transform and move towards upward social mobility, while also wanting to add distinction to the depiction of working-class families. According to Beck's (1992) framework,

educational aspirations and life course trajectories are reflexively constructed by the individual rather than structurally pre-determined, which is a deviance from common rational relative to the popular academic opinion (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984). Indeed, Hamza constructs his trajectory towards education through the storying of agency and the choices he made within the diverse options available regardless of the perceived structural and social constraints. Similarly to Nabeel, Hamza also storied himself as having a discursive understanding of the broader social changes and storied his pursuit of higher education as a pragmatic approach within the increasingly competitive nature of the labour market and as a means to improve his social capital.

Hamza also storied work as being a central part of his identity and in his narrative he began to define himself around his aspired career, something Giddens (1991) refers to as a 'life project'. Hamza constructed higher education as a vehicle of self-fulfilment and personal development and the labour market provided a platform for the type of person he wanted to be. According to Hamza his chosen career gave him a strong position within the labour market through which he was able to develop certain identities that shaped his goals and aspirations. Indeed, as Hamza's story unfolded, he began to construct educational credentials as enabling him to fulfil familial expectations and obligations:

"I spoke about it a bit ago, but I don't think one thing helped me decide...there were loads of things, like family expectations, the pressures to do well at school especially when everyone else is getting better grades than you, you kinda push yourself. To be honest, it's like life goals, everything happens at a different stage. So I went to school, had fun every

now and again but then I had to put my head down during GCSE's and passed. Then I decided to go to Sixth Form, I did well enough to get to uni. Now I'm here, I'm looking to get a good job, maybe even open up my own optometry place one day. I want to be self-employed eventually and optometry offers that in some way, even if there's loads of competition. It's a saturated market out there. Then next is getting married, having children and I'm kinda working towards that, to be successful enough to provide for future wife and kids with a reasonable income. Being a man means providing for a family, to do everything to make sure you are giving them a comfortable life. It's the duty of a Muslim man to provide for his family. I believe in traditional roles, where I work and the mother supports the upbringing of the kids. I don't mind her working before that happens but I would expect her not to once we decide to have children.'

Hamza's pragmatic rationality behind his decision to pursue higher education provides an insight into his cultural frame of reference. Indeed, at the onset, Hamza's narrative indicated a normative developmental path but this intersected with more traditional views of gender roles and expectation. The observations highlighted the ways in which certain male informants strongly identified with the provider role as being their duty as a Muslim. Indeed, Hamza's supports this understand as his narrative indicates how he discursively positions the breadwinner role as a religious obligation and draws on an understanding that men and women have complementary functions to fulfil each other's skills and 'natural' capacities (see Brown, 2006 and Siraj, 2012). In doing so Hamza demonstrates identifying with traditional cultural and religious values of his understanding of Islam and his religious obligations. Although the

complementary gender system has been historically prevalent in Islam (see Esposito, 1982) the structural constraint of gendered roles continues to remain dominant in modern societies in which men often stay the main breadwinner leaving women with housekeeping and childcare (Kulik and Tsoref, 2010). However, Hamza's narrative denies Muslim women agency in their choices and maintains that motherhood is an important component of Muslim femininity and women's duties pertain to child-rearing. As Hamza's narrative progressed, he once again brought his parents into the story as key characters and within a relational voice, referred them as reinforcing the performance of traditional gendered roles, by stating:

“For my parents, it was about me being the man of the house eventually, so doing a degree meant I would earn a good wage and look after my family”

However, Hamza's story suggests it was more complicated than this as in a communicative reflexive fashion he positions himself as wanting to perform traditional gendered norms out of choice rather than necessity. The following excerpts further indicates that his desire for a more 'traditional family' had less to do with channelling parental expectations and ambitions for him and more to do with his own religious understanding of what was expected of him as a Muslim man:

“You know this, in Islam, men and women are equal. We're equal in the eyes of God. One isn't better than the other. Women are encouraged to get an education and I would like to find someone who is educated. But I also think we have roles that each of us has to perform. As a Muslim man,

there is that expectation that I take on the role as providing for my future family and a woman is encouraged to take on her role, as a mother.”

Brown (2006) and Siraj (2012) argue that marriage is represented in Islam as the coupling of men and women so as to complement each other's skills and 'natural' capacities. Indeed, Hamza qualified his outlook through pragmatic rationalisation, in which Islamic notions of 'complementarity' were drawn on and equality was ideologically constructed. According to Hamza, a woman's place in the Islamic home is strongly bound up with mothering and the capacity to nurture (Mohammad, 2005) and as a man Hamza assumed the role of provider. Indeed, by drawing on an Islamic narrative to support, justify and reinforce his gender identity and performance he constructed traditional gender dichotomies within a religious framework.

Interestingly, Hamza's excerpt also demonstrates that he had no qualms about woman receiving an education; rather it was storied as a quality he was looking in a prospective partner. Research by Ahmad (2001, 2006) suggests that daughters are often encouraged to pursue higher education in order to secure appropriate matrimonial matches, due to the understanding that an educated Muslim man is more likely to find a Muslim woman in possession of a degree more desirable. Indeed, for many women in the present research, education was depicted as a tool to facilitate some agency in their choice of marriage partner and as a way to exercise the option to navigate gender roles in marriage (see Chapters 4 and 6). However, while the present and previous research (see Dwyer and Shah, 2009; Bagguley and Hussain, 2007; Mohee, 2011) argues that some Muslim women are using the higher educational space to develop new gendered identities, it does not mean that their static gendered positioning

within a marital home has altered. It seems that regardless of educational attainment, there remains cultural expectation for the female to take up the traditional homemaker role and the male to attain financial stability in order to secure the role as a patriarchal head of his future home. Therefore it could be argued that Muslim women do not necessarily benefit from equal access to education as their presence in higher education often remains located within patriarchal ideologies as it is only seen as an 'asset' for marriage rather than a credential to bring about social change. Hamza's narrative is an example of how gendered roles continue to remain customary to him and how he still expected a Muslim woman to adhere to the constructed notions of womanhood regardless of their academic success and his desire for it.

Hamza continued his narrative by constructing mothers as teachers and believed women had an innate ability to show kindness and compassion, thus drawing on narrative biological differences between a man and a woman:

"Men are like protectors of the family, whereas a mother in Islam is seen as a teacher for the children, they are given that status in Islam and I would want my children to have that benefit of having their mother at home, like my mum was. Plus women naturally have a softer, kinder side, which is why she's given that role."

In this excerpt Hamza is once again drawing on a narrative of complementarity in Islam (Brown, 2006; Siraj, 2012) and characterises women as behaving in accordance with their 'nature', thus demonstrating an essentialist understanding and rejecting his own agency in the matter. However, Connell (2003) reminds us that masculinity and femininity are not natural or innate; rather they are

socially constructed and as such, vary between cultures, ethnicities, social class and contexts. Therefore, it could be argued that Hamza is instead drawing on authoritative voices of gendered discourse consisting of the masculine/feminine, tough/soft dualism (Segal, 2007) and by describing women as being 'softer' it would allow Hamza to maintain a dominant positioning within his future household. It appeared that in order to maintain a hegemonic masculine social identity of power and control, Hamza resisted positioning women as having control and in doing so, he drew upon dominant cultural voices of femininity accordingly. It could also be argued that Hamza's essentialised position as 'protector' was a way to resist being positioned as subordinate to women even if he deemed women 'equal in the eyes of God.' Research has suggested that for Muslim men taking up a breadwinner role is a source of pride and a definition of what it means to be a man (Siraj, 2014).

Throughout Hamza's narrative he draws on his religious identity as a way to position himself as the patriarchal head. Indeed, Hamza emplotted the benefits of gaining a degree and securing professional employment as an 'asset' for his future identity in this regard. In doing so, Hamza stories his narrative towards 'domestic conformity' (McDowell, 2003:225) and subscription towards normative gender roles.

Summary

This chapter explored the everyday negotiations and structural constraints that shaped the lives of two young British Muslim men living and studying in Bradford. Indeed, a pertinent theme within the male informants' narrative was the intersecting of education and ethnicity, and the ways in which values and

norms in relation to education, jobs and career advancement were accommodated, negotiated, resisted or constrained within the context of their families, communities and the wider society. Nabeel drew on his academic credentials as a means to bring about social change and was less inclined to situate them as a desire for upward social mobility. Whereas in contrast, Hamza rationalise his pursuit of higher education as a means of upward social mobility as it would allow him to secure him a career in a respectable field. The importance of traditional agencies such as family and religion were also constructed as having a significant influence in fashioning their gender identities. However, while religious identification was important to both Nabeel and Hamza, how it was articulated varied greatly. For example, Nabeel drew on his religious identity in relation to his future aspirations and his desire to challenge stereotypical understandings of Muslim men. In contrast, Hamza drew on his religion as means to fulfil his duty as the breadwinner.

In relation to this, the analysis also recognised the fluidity of social identities and the ways in which masculinities are negotiated at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, class, and religion. Indeed, while Nabeel and Hamza's stories shared strong commonalities, in that they both replicate micro family values. Their narratives demonstrated to some degree, contrasting version of masculinities and their stories suggested that gender identities are defined in relational terms, as both referred to their parents as model examples of how they imagined their future homes. For example, Nabeel anticipated his future wife as having a professional career, like his mother, who was a working mother. Whereas, in contrast Hamza constructed a woman's position as being bound to the family

home and drew on his current home situation, where his mother maintains the homemaker role.

Chapter 8: Summary and conclusions

This final chapter aims to bring together the key findings from each phase of this research project in order to offer insights into the social realities of British Muslim students. These insights make a unique contribution to the understanding of the lived experiences of British Muslims within a university context. In addition, the methods' efficacy in addressing the research aims is evaluated and consideration is given to how the methodology has contributed to the understanding of a particular cohort of Muslims in Britain today. Finally, how the research findings might inform further research is suggested.

The research aimed to explore the lived experiences of young British Muslims in higher education at the University of Bradford: to understand young British Muslims involvement in higher education and explore the implications this has for the construction of their identities.

More specifically the research aimed to:

1. understand the ways in which young Muslims participate in everyday university life;
2. explore the accounts of Muslim student identities in the public and private sphere;
3. understand how young British Muslims negotiate their identity in relation to cultural narratives, as well as in and through particular places and moments;

4. explore young British Muslims' complex everyday negotiations of gendered identities, by exploring the temporal and circumstantial nature of social relationships and identities;
5. challenge the popular assumption of a unitary, homogenised stereotype of British Muslim, by drawing upon a range of accounts and show how they may or may not 'fit' the existing dominant ideological constructions.

In order to successfully meet the aims of this project, a pragmatic methodological approach to the research aims was used to further understand the lived experience of young Muslim students from multiple points of view. The research aimed to move beyond a one-dimensional account of British Muslims identities, and theorise the lived experiences and the negotiations taking place within the university space. Thus a pluralistic mixed method (Frost, 2011) approach was drawn upon to enable the theoretical development beyond monolithic sociological constructs and metanarratives. The benefits and value of methodological pluralism and how it has been effective in enabling a richer understanding of the social realities has been discussed in previous chapters (see Chapters 3 and 5). By rejecting a traditional mono-methodological research framework and moving away from a simplistic understanding, the research design provided a range of readings and interpretations of the negotiations of identity that took place within a university setting.

Key Research Findings

Early observations revealed the way individuals often socialised in relation to their ethnicity, in that students tended to socialise with other students from the same or similar ethnic heritage background. Muslim informants revealed a number of reasons for the separateness and comments in relation to this

obvious divide were often made in reference to the embodiment of Islam and what being a Muslim meant to them. The ethnographic observations suggested that belief was enacted and performed in relation to commodities such as food, drink and clothing. Here, positioning theory was a useful analytical tool to explore how positions were occupied by the informants in the field, and in turn how informants used their religion as means to negotiate and renegotiate their positions within the university space. During observations, informants suggested that the ethnic clustering and segregation was due to the dominant drinking culture embedded in, generally speaking, the non-Muslim student lifestyle. Since Islam prohibits alcohol consumption, members of the sample indicated that they avoided such environments, thus creating a social distance between themselves and their non-Muslim peers. Muslim informants considered the abstinence of alcohol as a meaningful and symbolic statement of identification with the Muslim community within the university space. Similarly, for some female informants, the hijab was also considered an expression of their Muslim identity. The young women observed claimed to be taking ownership of their bodies through their use of the hijab, but were also found to be performing their Muslim identity by drawing upon popular Western fashion. It was suggested that while women in the present research portrayed the hijab as a symbolic statement to express their religious identity, the popular hijab styles and fashion choices also informed their decision.

For some informants, certain social customs did not hinder their university experience, however, others storied these differences as inhibiting their integration into university life, and this was brought to the forefront of certain informant's stories during the narrative interviews. For example, Ayesha and

Nabeel narrated a desire to challenge the stereotypical understanding of Muslims living segregated lives and attempted to participate in everyday university life by not restricting their social group to just Muslims. Their stories were in contrast to literature on British Muslims living segregated lives (see, for example, The Cantle Report, 2001), in that these students narrated using their time at university to broaden their social circle and defy the stereotypical depictions of Muslims. Ayesha described university as positive experience as it enabled her to meet a diverse and interesting range of people, while also allowing her to practice Islam differently in comparison to home. However, the desire to 'break barriers' was considered difficult for Nabeel, due to the perceived differences in relation to behaviour and lifestyle. This heightened his feeling of not belonging to the wider university culture and thus resulted in him turning to members of his minority group for support by joining The Islamic Society (ISOC). However, it should be noted that the research highlighted that while some informants subscribed to this, others resisted. Segregation was not bound by the marking of territory and the desire to remain within religion dependent social groups, instead their choices embodied practices contingent to their 'Muslimness'. Be that the prohibition of alcohol, eating halal food or wearing the hijab, these recognised differences served as a symbolic statement of their Muslim identity within the university space.

Phase one highlighted the importance of ISOC and the pivotal role it played in the formation of some Muslim students' university experience. This was similar to research by Song (2012), as the present research also found that joining ISOC was a popular choice for some informants as it allowed them to socialise with members of the same religious group. It also provided a social context and

narrative space in which Muslim students were able to negotiate a strong religious identity. By drawing upon the positioning theory, it was argued that through encounters at university, young Muslims were positioning themselves in relation to others and through negotiations were actively taking up a strong religious identity. This was identified in Nabeel's story which drew on the notions of segregation and clustering that was observed during the ethnographic observations. According to Nabeel's narrative, his decision to join ISOC was embedded in how he was perceived and positioned by the non-Muslim peers on his course. The feeling of 'belonging' also brought with it uncertainty when it came to jobs and career advancement. Certain informants were conscious that their 'Muslimness' would mean that they would find it difficult to find employment due to their religious status. Both Nabeel and Sara commented on Muslims experiencing discrimination in the job market due to visible traits, such as the hijab or the beard, or simply due to their name. Nabeel in particular showed concern towards racialised inequalities present in the labour market (also see Savage, 2000; Reynolds and Birdwell, 2015; Lindley, 2002) and while he was aware of the structural factors that might impinge on his career prospects, he also drew on a narrative of agency to overcome his sense of these inequalities. Nabeel's story was significant because he was not interested in upholding a monolithic understanding of Muslims; rather he drew up strategies to resist being reduced to the position of the other. Indeed, the Muslim identity was important to informants and some recognised ISOC as a space that allowed them to balance their university education with their religious obligations. ISOC was constructed as being central to the formation of their university experience and was rooted in the notion of belonging.

Indeed, informants narrated their engagement with higher education in relation to being a Muslim and their religious identity. However, while being a Muslim appeared to be a constant anchor in their life, how they constructed it varied considerably. For some, their Muslim identity was constructed in relation to their engagement with higher education. For example, Ayesha's agentic self-narration constructed her religious identity by creating a distance between herself and her 'conservative' upbringing. In that she resisted the traditional dogmatic practicing of Islam while also engaging in ISOC. This allowed her to meet a diverse group of people and learn about the different ways to practice Islam ('compared to home'), therefore illustrating that being a 'good Muslim' was central to her identity but done on her terms. On a similar notion, Nabeel and Fatima wanted to distance themselves from the dominant narratives about Muslims and constructed their identities through their position in higher education to re-define the wider society's understandings of British Muslims. Therefore highlighting that their 'Muslimness' was not fixed but dependent upon how they were positioned by other. Indeed, informants presented their narrative through the language of agency, their identities were constructed through wider social and collective repertoires and it became apparent that certain performances were rooted within particular contexts and different audience reactions. Therefore, it could be argued that their religious identity was reliant upon not only how they constructed themselves in relation to others, and how they were observed and positioned by those around her.

Certainly, some informants' narrative accounts indicated an understanding that a degree will bring about ethnic social capital and the opportunity for a better job. This was in line with the literature reviewed (see Chapter 1), which

highlighted the sociological notions of ethnic and social capital and suggested that South Asian (specifically Pakistani) parents socialised their children to understand the importance of education and encouraged participation (Modood, 2014; Shah et al., 2010; Bagguley and Hussain, 2007; Bagguley and Hussain, 2014; Mellor, 2011). Indeed, the sociological notions of ethnic and social capital are also line with Erikson's (1968) theory of identity development, where it is argued that the development of identity occurs through an individual's interactions with others. It begins with family members and subsequently is influenced by peers and members of the community and larger society. Indeed, Erikson (1968) emphasises the role of the parents in shaping their children's identity. Similarly, this research revealed the ways in which family influenced the construction of Muslim students' identity, and for some informants, parental influence shaped their educational aspirations and were central to the construction of their identity.

The observations and narrative interviews highlighted ethnic and social capital as a significant reason for informants' engagement with higher education. As such, familial influences were considered impactful, and similar to the understanding that young British Muslims are often encouraged to participate in higher education as a means to facilitate social mobility (Bagguley and Hussain, 2014; Mellor, 2011). However, the stories also gave an understanding that informants' choices were agentic in relation to the family environment. In that the way young Muslims discussed their engagement with higher education was often in relation to traditional agencies such as family and religion. Some informants referenced them as influencing and shaping their identities and often nurturing their negotiation of the university space. For example, Sara's narrative

implied that there was always a pressure from her family on her to attain a degree qualification, however, her story unfolded to reveal a sense of agency and choice. She accomplished this sense of agency by storying participation at university as a 'something to fall back on', and constructed her position as being less to do with financial necessity and more to do with moderating the potential constraints placed on her by the Pakistani culture, both in terms of marriage and the potentiality of divorce. However, while there were constraints identified in her story, she took ownership of her decision. In contrast, Ayesha's narrative was at odds with the literature on the value of higher education to South Asian Muslim families and was more compatible with literature which suggests working-class parents are often less likely to be ambitious for their children (Shah et al., 2010). Alternatively, Fatima storied higher education as a platform to demonstrate that she was capable of having a professional career, being financially independent, fulfil her religious duties and be a wife and mother. Indeed, her narrative made reference to the generational shift and the ways in which young British Muslim women are drawing upon agency and resisting existing structural and cultural inequalities in relation to race and ethnicity.

Similarly, their male counterparts also discussed their engagement with higher education and drew upon on the micro-family and religion as shaping their identities. For example, Nabeel's story highlighted the way in which he had mobilised his religious identity in relation to his educational choices. Nabeel considered it his duty, as a Muslim, to use the knowledge and expertise acquired at university as an opportunity to help others. For Nabeel, university was not simply a route towards upward social mobility, rather he was using it as a means to challenge common misconceptions about Muslims and discourses

around British Muslims and 'integration'. His reasons for participating in university counters the predominately monolithic understandings of British Muslim men, who are often depicted as aggressive, antisocial and a 'problem status' (see Alexander, 2000; Archer, 2001; Ramji, 2005). Like Nabeel, Hamza was also pragmatic when it came to his pursuit of higher education. In that he had a discursive understanding of the broader social changes and storied his pursuit of higher education within the increasingly competitive nature of the labour market and as a means to improve his social capital. However, in contrast, Hamza constructed a degree qualification as a means of achieving upward social mobility and securing employment that would allow him to fulfil the breadwinner role. Indeed, Hamza was using his religious identity as a way to position himself as the patriarchal head of his future home, as he considered it his duty as a Muslim man to be the economic provider.

The stories revealed by informants demonstrated how young British Muslims engagement in higher educations intersected with a number of identity axes, such as ethnicity, religion, class and gender, that contributed to their experiences. In particular, the university space was negotiated in relation to informants' Muslim identity and choices were contingent to their 'Muslimness'. Indeed, while the stories did not challenge the culturally homogenous construct of social and ethnic capital, they did counter the monolithic sociological understandings of British Muslims, as their stories showcased the power relations and agency involved in their choices.

Perhaps one of the most consistent themes to emerge from the observations and interviews was how defined self and their construction of identities were relative to family dynamics. Each narrative interview illustrated the construction

of identities as agentic in relation to the family and all spoke about family at length. Indeed, the family environment was considered important when it came to the construction of identity. A central theme within the male and female informants' narrative was the idea of complementarity and how identities were located, contingent and created in relation to one another. Informants storied their choices in ways that upheld or resisted cultural expectations. For example, some young Muslim men positioned themselves as 'masculine' as they discussed their future roles as providers. Through discussion, they opened up and made available positions for their female counterparts to take up the feminine carer role. This was initially discussed during the first phase of fieldwork where the application of positioning theory enabled an understanding of how distinctly feminine positionings were resisted by some, but not all, female informants. The research revealed that these women, in their acceptance of, or resistance to, adopting a feminine role, occupied a position of having control over their futures with an attempt to bring about social change within their respective communities. Therefore observing these evolving social episodes enabled an appreciation of the complexity of negotiations that occurred and the consequent positions that were sustained, resisted or constrained during these encounters. The analysis of the observations revealed that gender is a fluid concept dependent upon specific circumstances of interaction and that through agentic processes and complex relational encounters, informants were able to challenge and protect their chosen positionings.

As stated, Muslim men's masculinities are often imagined in a stereotypical way, in that they are considered as being aggressive, fundamentalist or members of the Asian gang (Hopkins 2006). In contrast, the present research

sought to explore young British Muslims men's everyday negotiations of gendered identities in relation to their participation in higher education, particularly, as discussed in the literature section, the research indicates that they are often ignored when it comes to understanding Muslim involvement in post-compulsory education. Through several responses to the crisis of masculinity discourse, the heterogeneous and multiple natures of youthful Muslim masculinities challenges narrow and confined definitions of Muslimness. It was revealed that young men's masculine identities were not constructed in simple terms, in that certain informants build upon a range of patriarchal, misogynistic and privileged discourses, while others were open to more equal, accepting and less dominant forms of gendered identities. As such, the present research revealed contrasting version of masculinities, in that while some subscribed to traditional hegemonic masculine identity, others preferred to forge an alternative masculine identity.

For example, during the narrative interview, Nabeel attempted to reject the cultural understanding of what it means to be a man, which often meant the male was the primary breadwinner and the female maintained a role within the marital home. However, his story revealed that while he preferring a working wife, he did not reveal the desire to be the primary carer for future children. Nabeel's positioning is not unusual, previous, as well the present research has shown that Muslim men often prefer to perform hegemonic masculinity on the understanding that men and women have complementary functions to fulfil each other's skills and 'natural' capacities (see Brown, 2006 and Siraj, 2012). Indeed, this was the position Hamza upheld in that he constructed a role for himself as the economic provider as a means to fulfil this religious duty. What was

interesting with regards to the narrative accounts was the way in which informants' gender identities were defined in relational terms. In that all informants situated their positions in relation to the family dynamic, illustrating agency in relation to family, while also displaying constraints due to cultural expectations. Indeed, the ideology of family and marriage were central to the stories 'told' during the narrative interviews. Informants used key characters in their life to either model a future similar to that of their parents or oppose the traditional family dynamics. For example, Nabeel drew on his parents and used them as examples as a successful relationship in which both man and woman were considered equal partners. Likewise, Hamza drew on his mother's homemaker status as a way to rationalise his traditional outlook and argued that in Islam men and women are considered 'equal' but have different roles and responsibilities within the Islamic home. In doing so, Hamza denied Muslim women agency in their choice, and reinforced traditional gender dichotomies using a religious framework.

Similarly, Sara and Fatima also affirmed the notions of complementarity and were looking ahead towards marriage, family and motherhood, thus demonstrating the performance of femininity at the intersections of gender and ethnicity. Fatima, and more specifically Sara, placed emphasis on being a 'good mother' as a moral responsibility, therefore, reducing the potential for social change. Sara's story was crafted in an agentic fashion and her imagined future and family were central to her decision to pursue higher education. Like Hamza, she drew on the Islamic notion of 'complementary' gender roles (Brown, 2006), in which being a mother took precedence over developing a career. In doing so, Sara drew on this idealised version of femininity through the language of choice

and did not construct her decision as being dependent on traditional relations, instead her narrative favoured themes that emphasised agency and self-empowerment. Similarly, Fatima's narrative suggested that she desired a more assertive position in her future relationship yet also positioned herself as having a role within the home and as a primary caregiver. Therefore, indicating that her identities were contingent and created in relation to her male counterparts and the notions of complementarity.

However, there was some diversity amongst the female informants, in that Ayesha resisted the notions of complementarity and cultural expectations and situated herself within the context of gender equality by challenging 'traditional' notions of motherhood. Ayesha used her narrative to criticise the concept of marriage and having a family as being meaningful markers of a successful life while also questioning its prominence within the Muslim community. Instead, she endorsed the pursuit of a life-course that was not built on fulfilling cultural expectations, in which she conformed to performing a traditional feminine role of homemaker and carer. Ayesha's narrative revealed that she was not interested in maintaining femininity according to dominant cultural ideologies and her story suggested that she was using higher education as a means to negotiate an alternative and more empowering identity through an agentic plotline.

The literature reviewed indicated that Muslims, particularly Muslim women, now have greater options than their parents in living their lives outside of the constraints associated with conventional gender roles and norms (see Mohee, 2011; Bhopal, 2009). The informants narrated that they were making independent decisions in an agentic way though their choices were regulated and organised through hegemonic gender relation. However, by suggesting that

they were successfully performing empowered identities did not imply a freedom to choose. Through the application of a narrative framework, the complex negotiations in reworking identities were highlighted. The informants constructed their choices in ways that presented them as ‘empowering’ or ‘liberated’, while also having to monitor their choices in ways that were more consistent with heteronormative cultural ideologies to rationalise themselves. Therefore, indicating that negotiation of identity within the higher education context does not provide a straightforward offering of new gender identities. It should also be noted that these interviews were conducted while the informants were near to the beginning of their degrees and therefore their aspirations may have been idealistic at this point and shaped by the promise of higher education. Indeed, if I were to speak to them now, their narratives might be different. Therefore, future research could involve tracking Muslim students as they move through and out of higher education.

Ayesha and Nabeel, presented their narrative through the language of agency and negotiated their presence in higher education as a way to construct a distance from homogenising and essentialist versions of Muslim personhood, and in Ayesha’s case, specifically womanhood, in the Bradford context, whilst allowing them to practice Islam in a more liberal way and thus still be a ‘good Muslim.’ Sara and Hamza narrated their story in a relational manner by reflecting upon negotiated agency. Sara situated her involvement in higher education as a way of complying with her family’s expectations in relation to ethnic aspirational capital. However, the meta-narrative of ethnic capital undermined her anticipated identity as a wife and mother. She managed this contradiction through alignment with gender complementarity and ‘education-

as-future-asset' within an immigrant Muslim context. Similarly, Hamza drew on traditional roles revealed by Sara, in that he emplotted the benefits of gaining a degree and securing professional employment as an 'asset' for his future identity in this regard. In doing so, Hamza stories his narrative towards 'domestic conformity' (McDowell, 2003:225) and subscription towards normative gender roles, by drawing on Islamic notions of 'complementarity', where he secures the role as the breadwinner. In contrast, Fatima draws on agency to construct a political identity as an advocate for the ideology that 'Muslim women can have it all'; thus, for her, agency was social. However, her story is undermined by gendered constraints on the 'have it all' meta-narrative and like other informants in the study, affirms the ideas of complementarity. Indeed, it was evident that as each narrative unfolded, their stories suggested a negotiation of new identities and drew on agency to pose alternatives by drawing on and rejected constituted positioning's within their public and private sphere. However, in their narrative they did not overtly state how certain powers enabled or constrained this 'negotiation'. In that, the social and structural constraints inherent in gender, class and Muslim identities were also evident in the narratives shared. As such, while informants challenged the traditional discourses imposed on them, and storied them through the notional idea of 'resistance', away from performing under the control of social structures and performances. However, by deconstructing the stories, there is a suggestion that their decisions are socially constrained and mediated through them challenging their opposition as an active social agent. Therefore, suggesting that rather than higher education straightforwardly offering new, more empowering gender identities, as Muslim identities remain central to varying

extents, these young Muslims had to do identity work not only to justify themselves but also to make sense of their identities within complex cultural contexts.

The stories in this research foreground the ways in which identities are negotiated at the intersection of a 'matrix of discourses' such as, gender, class, social capital as well as religious identity, specifically through the storying of agency. Moreover, the findings highlighted the fluidity, instability and positioning of social identities that were constructed within the contexts of racialisation and gender. The analysis of the observations and interview material suggests that informants incorporated a story that positioned them as individuals who made their own choices within an agentic framework. Moreover, higher education was constructed as a means to redefine their gender identity and the ways in which they are depicted by the wider societal markers. However, one of the central tenets of the informants' plotline was not merely about Muslims utilising university as a place whereby they are able to forge new identities, as depicted in previous literature but instead their narratives highlighted that while each of them placed emphasis on choice through an agentic frame of reference, higher education is a context which demands the negotiation of identities that both enabled and constrained. Muslims in higher education continue to be considered a homogenous entity, however the analysis drew on some themes that are similar to the existing literature but also brought to the foreground the subtleties, similarities and diversity which challenge the rigid and uniform sociological constructs and narratives.

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Appendices

Appendix 1



Invitation and Information - Participant observation

My name is Ifsa Hussain. I am a postgraduate student at the University of Bradford. I am conducting a research study as part of my PhD. The aim of my research is to conduct an in depth study of the experiences of young British Muslim students in higher education in Britain, specifically in Bradford.

I would like to invite you to participate in the first part of the research which involves me generally observing students taking part in everyday activities around the University and talking to you about the activities you are involved in.

Your participation will allow me to understand more about issues that might be relevant to British Muslim students and allow me to develop questions for the later stages of the study which will involve conducting individual interviews and focus groups. I may ask you if you would also like to be involved in either of these at a later date but you are not obliged to if you agree to take part now.

Taking part in this research is your decision; you do not have to take part if you do not wish to. However, if you decide to participate I will observe the activities you are currently involved in; I may also ask you some questions but these will not be of a personal nature. They will be to clarify the activities you are involved in. I may also take some notes of your responses.

Your participation will be confidential and anonymous. Any personal information you provide and notes on my observations or what you say will be kept in a secure location. I will type up these notes but anonymise any identifying information about you. The results of the research may be published or presented at conferences nationally and internationally and quotes from what you say may be used, but your identity will remain anonymous.

You do not have to answer any question you are not comfortable answering.

Would you be interested in participating in my study?

If yes

At the end of my observation I will check that you are still happy for me to use my observations of you and what you have said by showing you my field notes.

Please remember that your participation is completely voluntary and if you would like further information about the research please contact me at:

ihussa31@student.bradford.ac.uk

Appendix 2



Phase II

Invitation Letter - Interviews

Study Title: *Exploring the experiences of young British Muslims in higher education*

Dear student,

My name is Ifsa Hussain. I am a postgraduate student at the University of Bradford. I am conducting a research study as part of my PhD. My research studentship has been funded by the School of Social and International Studies; Division of Psychology at the University of Bradford. However, the focus of my research is related to my own interests and I would like to invite you to participate.

The aim of my research is to conduct an in depth study of the experiences of young British Muslim students in higher education, specifically in Bradford. If you class yourself as a young (aged 18-21) Muslim student, you are invited to participate. If you are interested in participating I will send you further information to help you decide if you would like to be involved. Briefly though, if you decide to participate I will be conducting a one-to-one individual interview with you. The interviews will cover a number of topic areas about your experiences of being a Muslim in Britain at the University of Bradford.

The research will take place during the working week at the University. The interviews will be audio recorded so that I can remember and reflect on what is discussed. The research will take place during your working week. The interviews will be recorded so that I can reflect on what is discussed. Your participation will be confidential and you will remain anonymous.

However, taking part in this research is your decision. You do not have to participate in this research if you do not wish to and if you decide to participate but on a later date decide you want to withdraw your data, you have the right to do so.

The proposed research would prefer to involve individuals who have not taken part in a similar study recently. If you have, then you do not need to respond.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the research. You may contact me at ihussa31@student.bradford.ac.uk or my supervisors at s.e.johnson2@bradford.ac.uk or/and a.l.mdee@bradford.ac.uk if you have related questions or issues with the research.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please contact me by email for further information and to discuss participating.

With kind regards,

Ifsa Hussain

Postgraduate Student, Division of Psychology

Appendix 3



Phase II Information Sheet- Interviews

Further information about taking part in the research study

Exploring the experiences of young British Muslims in higher education

Thank you for showing an interest in taking part in the research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask the researcher or her supervisors if there is anything that is not clear to you or you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the research?

My research aims to conduct an in depth study of the experiences of young British Muslim students in higher education, specifically in Bradford. It aims to explore a number of factors including how young Muslims negotiate their identity within the higher educational context in Bradford and the ways in which family and cultural background relates to their experiences of being a student.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen because you represent the required student profile. The research aims to understand a particular kind of educational experience that of young British Muslim students aged 18-21, in higher education in Bradford and therefore does not require individuals from other backgrounds, religious or ethnic groups.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is completely voluntary, so it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will have the opportunity to ask any questions you may have before signing a consent form.

If you decide to participate but on a later date decide you want to withdraw your data, you have the right to do so and any data collected will be destroyed. Also during the interview, you can decline to respond to questions you feel uncomfortable in answering. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not have any negative consequences.

What do I have to do?

You have been asked to take part in an individual semi-structured interview. This will involve a set of questions focussing on your experiences as a young British Muslim in higher education at the University of Bradford.

Once you have decided that you would like to take part in the research, an interview date will be arranged and will take place within 2-3 weeks of your response, at an agreed time suitable for yourself and the researcher. Interviews will take place at the University of Bradford in the Psychology Observation Suites on E floor.

Before the interview begins, you will have the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the research and if you are still happy to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. There will be no pressure to talk about anything you prefer to keep private.

The interview will last approximately one hour, depending on how much you want to say and will be audio recorded digitally.

Will what I say during the interview be kept confidential?

All the information that the researcher collects from you during the interview will be kept strictly confidential. The interview data will be audio recorded digitally. Data will be stored as digital files on a password-protected computer. Only the researcher will have access to the recorded data. Data is required to be stored by the University of Bradford for 10 years after which time it will be destroyed.

Your details will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. Any reference to you will be anonymised in the dissemination of findings.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Even though this research forms part of the researcher's PhD, it is hoped that the findings can contribute in a positive way to existing knowledge, in that they will provide a rich and comprehensive understanding of young British Muslim students; experience, particularly in Bradford. Their experiences and needs could possibly lead to better policy formation by policy makers at a university level which cater for students from such backgrounds. It may also benefit you as a participant, as it will allow you to reflect on your educational experience.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The results will be written up into a thesis which will be submitted to the University of Bradford.

The research findings will also be written up and presented at various seminars/conferences or published in academic forums. If you would like to be kept informed about the research presentations/publications arising from this research please indicate this on your consent form and the researcher will provide you with any publications arising from this study.

Who is supporting and authorising this research?

This research is partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy. The research has been funded by the School of Social and International Studies; Division of Psychology at the University of Bradford and the focus of my research is related to my own interests.

The researcher is a research student at the University of Bradford. This research is supervised by two supervisors from University of Bradford. They are Dr Sally Johnson (Principal Supervisor) and Dr Anna Mdee (Associate Supervisor). Their contact details as below:

Contact for further information:

If you wish to discuss participation further before making a decision you may speak to Ifsa Hussain, the researcher, via email her at ihussa31@student.bradford.ac.uk

You also can directly contact to her supervisors at s.e.johnson2@bradford.ac.uk and/or a.l.mdee@bradford.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this information sheet and considering taking part.

Appendix 4



Phase II – Individual Interviews

Consent Form

Title: *Exploring the experiences of young British Muslims in higher education*

Name of Researcher: Ifsa Hussain

| | Statements | Please Tick |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. | I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided on the information sheet. | |
| 2. | I have had 24 hours to consider my involvement. | |
| 3. | I understand that my participation in this research is based on voluntary consent and that I have the right to withdraw from the research before the process of data analysis starts without giving any reason. | |
| 4. | The aims of the research have been explained to me. | |
| 5. | I have had the opportunity to ask any questions regarding this research. | |
| 6. | I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded and give my consent for such recordings to be made. | |
| 7. | I understand that quotes from interviews may be used in any write-up but that these would be anonymous. | |
| 8. | I have been advised that recordings from the interview will be stored in on a password protected computer. All the information that the researcher collects during the research will be kept strictly confidential for 10 years and will be destroyed and deleted after 10 years from the completion of the project. | |
| 9. | I understand the anonymous research findings | |

| | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| | may be read by others and/or published. | |
| 10. | I understand I can contact the researcher via the email address provided for a summary of the findings that arise from this research. | |
| 11. | I understand that the research forms part of the researcher's (Ifsa Hussain) PhD' requirements. | |
| 12. | I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep for my records. | |

Printed Name of the Participant :

Signature of the Participant :

Date :

Printed Name of the Researcher :

Signature of the Researcher :

Date :
